



# Tips for Asking for Recommendations

Like many faculty and staff at DU, CME staff member are often asked to provide letters/forms of recommendations for students involved in our programs. Below are some tips to make sure you get the best recommendation you can, and maintaining good relationships with your recommenders.

## 1. Connect with potential recommenders from the beginning

Well before you even need letters, make sure you're making personal connections with instructors, advisors and supervisors. If you've never had a conversation with the faculty member leading the large lecture class, they probably can't say too much about you in a letter. For a variety of good reasons (standing out of the crowd, showing interest in the class/activity, etc), make those connections as soon as you can!

## 2. Ask early

Waiting until the last minute to ask, indicates poor organizational skills on your part and suggests you have little respect for the writer's time. Your strongest recommender might not be available, or might not have time to meet your deadline. And even if the person will write for you, they may not be able to be as thorough or thoughtful as they would with more than a few days preparation. If you want the best letter, give them plenty of time.

## 3. Be realistic about whom you ask

While well-known names and lofty titles certainly look good as references, more important is that the writer can speak from direct experience with you. It's best to ask people with whom you've had considerable, in-person contact with you. For example, advisors who've witnessed you interpersonal and leadership skills, instructors who've seen your in-class participation and academic performance, and supervisors who know your work ethic.

## 4. Be intentional and specific

*Think about what the specific program is likely looking for, and ask for references/recommendations accordingly.* Asking a supervisor in a retail business to speak to your academic skills, or a faculty member to address your leadership or customer service experience probably won't provide you the strongest recommendation. They might refuse, or might politely provide an understandably vague or weak support. So think about who knows you best regarding the qualities or experiences that matter; and ask those people.

Whomever you ask, *be specific with what experiences, strengths or skills you want them to focus on.* It's often best to have references who can speak to various aspects of your qualifications. (E.g., I've asked Dr Gonzales to speak to my academic success, and was hoping you could focus on my varied campus involvements.)

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## 5. Provide all needed information

You're asking for a considerable investment of time and energy, and you want the person to be positive about you. So, make the letter-writing and submission process as easy as possible for them:

- Complete any demographic or contact information blanks/questions about you before giving them the form: your name, email and addresses, ID numbers, signature and waiver of access. This way you know they're current and correct as well.
- Provide a cover note or email calling your reference-writer's attention to:
  - To whom should the letter be addressed? Search/Selection Committee? A specific person at the organization?
  - What specific skills, experiences, interests, etc., the program is looking for, that they should address in their letter. For example, if it's a leadership program, having them just talk about your test-taking prowess probably won't be enough.
  - Clear instructions on what they need to do with the completed recommendation: print it on letterhead, seal it in an envelope, return it to you, or send it directly to the requesting organization, upload to a specific website, etc. Not doing this adds burden to your reference and opens more possibilities for mistakes, delays and missed deadlines!
  - The deadline for taking their next step. Do you need it back two days before you have to submit the full packet? Must it be postmarked by or received by a certain date? Etc.
- If there is a personal statement or other essay-like piece to the application, provide a draft to your writer, so they have a sense of what you're saying and can speak in support of it. (So you'll need to start that early too!)
- Provide a copy of your current résumé or CV. This gives your writer a quick reference for dates and details, and can allow them to see the larger you—perhaps even able to reference how their experience with you resonates with and complements your broader activities.
- If it must be mailed, provide an addressed and stamped envelope (unless it requires an letterhead envelope). Don't make the writer pay postage on top of spending time on your letter.

## 6. Thank them afterwards, and keep them updated on your progress.

No one is required to serve as your reference; and it is likely not time or a task that "counts" in their performance evaluation. So for the sheer gift they've given you, send them an email or hardcopy note of thanks.

Given the number of students, forms and deadlines most faculty and staff work with, they might not remember to ask you specifically; but if they've written you a reference, they probably would like to know whether you got the scholarship, job, etc. Drop a quick note when you know, thanking them again for the reference regardless of the outcome.

Both final steps demonstrate your thoughtfulness and follow-through—qualities that make them more likely to be reference for you again, and to be even more positive about you!

And all these steps are further evidence to your writer that you are thoughtful, organized and worthy of their support...

**Remember, good planning makes for a good recommendation! Good luck!**

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