

Instructions for Requesting Letters of Recommendation

There is going to come a time during your undergraduate career when you will request letters of recommendation from professors or teaching assistants. These letters may be for summer programs, grad school, fellowships, or jobs.

Listed below are some guidelines that will help you in the process. Knowing what you want beforehand will no doubt result in a more informative and error-free letter.

When requesting a letter of recommendation, you should ask if the instructor:

- would like to see any of your problem sets, papers, or other items that might be helpful;
- would like to meet with you to discuss your plans in more detail;
- feels that he/she knows you well enough to write a strong letter.

With regard to the latter point above, it should be emphasized that the most important thing to do if and when down the line you anticipate needing a recommendation letter is to get to know at least a couple of your instructors very well. Even if you did an excellent job in a class, your professor or TA is only able to write so much if he/she never really got to know you.

One way to get better acquainted with a professor or TA is to go to that instructor's office hour. Because of the student-to-faculty ratio in the NYU Physics Department, the faculty is very accessible.

After a professor or TA has agreed to write a letter, you should give him/her the following materials, either neatly arranged in a folder or sent by email, whichever the professor prefers. If you then decide to apply to additional programs, you can then simply supplement the folder with the new materials. If possible, give the instructor all of the programs at one time; this keeps things more organized and reduces the chance of errors.

Here are the following materials that you should present:

1. A detailed list of all the programs you're applying to. For each program, you should provide:

- Due date (specify if postmarked date or receipt date);
- Name and location of the program;
- Website for the program;

- To whom the letter should be addressed;
 - How to submit the letter. Specify which of the three ways applies:
 - I. Address to which the instructor should mail it. Note any accompanying forms.
 - II. You pick up the letter in a signed and sealed envelope. Give the date you will pick it up. Note any accompanying forms.
 - III. url of the online recommendation form (if known at this time).
2. Stamped and addressed envelopes for the letters that need to be mailed, along with any accompanying forms.
 3. An academic transcript, which you can print one out from the web.
 4. A list of courses taken from the instructor, the year and term, and the grade.
 5. A resume, if you have one (you should have one by the end of your sophomore year).
 6. A brief, one-paragraph personal statement about why you want to do the program that you're applying to, and what your future plans are. This statement is a good opportunity to remind your instructor of any particular strengths you have, if a significant amount of time has passed from your main interaction with him/her.