Seattle Pacific University
Department of Family & Consumer Sciences
Didactic Program in Dietetics

How to Ask for a Letter of Recommendation, Nicely

Writing letters of recommendation is an important part of a professor's job, and we're honored to do it. But it's also a chore – a happy chore, but a chore nonetheless – so you need to be clear, polite, thorough, detailed, and respectful of your professor's time. Because your professors take the writing of recommendation letters very seriously, they expect you to do the same. Recommendations reflect not just your qualities as a student, but also our integrity as your professors and ultimately the quality of our program and university. It is best to think about letters of recommendations well ahead of when you actually need them. This means that you need to develop an intellectual and personal relationship with your professor that extends over several quarters or years. Here's how to help your professors write you a good letter of recommendation.

1. **Choose a faculty member who knows you well,** preferably in a variety of contexts. Ask yourself: which professor knows me well enough to be able and comfortable writing a strong recommendation for me? Internship directors and graduate school admissions committees read hundreds of reference letters, most of which offer generic praise. A good letter that is likely to be noticed and appreciated comes from a professor who can name what specifically sets you apart from other students, and is able to provide examples of your analytical and communication skills, reliability, strong work ethic, thoroughness, and ability to follow through on projects and ideas, as well as work with others and independently. The more a professor knows about you, the more specific the letter will be.

2. **Ask for a recommendation – don't tell**. A formal meeting is better than a call or e-mail. In this meeting you can share why you have chosen this professor. Give her time to consider your request. Occasionally, your professor may express reluctance or be unable to write you a letter. This happens most frequently when the professor doesn't know you well enough to write anything significant or when she has doubts about your abilities or performance. If this is your experience, don't push it. If what you are requesting is to put your professor as a reference on a resume or form, or to have a check-list form completed, you do not need to have a meeting; simply send a detailed e-mail or leave a voice mail message.

3. **Ask early**. Make your request *no later than 60 days before the letter is due*. For dietetic internship letters, this is the end of final exam week during autumn quarter. Once you have decided who to ask, find out when your professor can meet with you to discuss the recommendation letter and make an appointment accordingly. Professors have very tight schedules and need ample time to craft a thoughtful and distinctive letter. Letters requested later will be completed only after all letters requested on time have been written and may be less favorable than they would have been if requested on time. In addition, every professor reserves the right to refuse to write the recommendation if the request comes in too late.

4. **E-mail the details.** Once you've got the green light, send your professor *no later than January 1* the information listed below in a *single Word document* (no need to provide a hard copy, unless an individual

professor requests this). Make sure to submit information for all programs you are applying to in a single document. Let your professor know if the letter(s) will need to be posted online, mailed out directly to the internship or graduate program or returned to you in a signed and sealed envelope, for you to mail out together with your application. Please do not use any formatting, such as tabs or bullets, but simply start each response to the points below on a new line after a blank line, using 11-pt Calibri font. Remember that the more professors know about you and your aspirations, the more specific they can be about your talents and motivation.

- ☑ Your **name**, SPU student **ID**, your **total SPU GPA,** and your **DPD GPA.**
- ☑ List of **all the courses you have taken from this professor,** the quarter you took each & the grade received.
- ☑ Note the month and year since when you have known/been working with this professor.
- ☑ List five to ten perceived personal **strengths** and at least *a couple of examples* of situations or experiences that have manifested one of these strengths, as well as how you perceive these strengths would benefit you in your internship and future career.
- ☑ List of three to five perceived **weaknesses/areas of growth** and how these might affect you in the future.
- ☑ Statement about what **aspect of your work or character** you would like **this particular** professor to focus on or highlight in their letter (e.g. work in a specific class, performance on a certain paper or project, advising experience, certain qualities that the particular professor has observed, etc.) Because different professors will be writing about different aspects of who you are and what you would bring to a program, the sum of all letters written for you can help the selection/admissions committee get a more well-rounded idea of what you're bringing to the table.
- ☑ List of the **internships or programs for which you are requesting letters** of recommendation, including the due date, *if different from February 15th,* and the names of the other professors who are sending a letter for you to each program. If applying to an internship that does not participate in DICAS or a graduate program, please provide the mailing address and the name of the Program Director.
- ☑ A brief **description of each internship**/program, noting why you are specifically interested in it.
- ☑ List of the names only of **any other internship** to which you are applying, but for which you do not need a letter of recommendation from this professor.
- ☑ *(For letters from the DPD Director only)* List of all courses (dietetics and otherwise) that remain to be completed before your graduation, along with intended completion dates and where you will complete them. Make sure to include courses that are currently in progress.

5. **E-mail your recommender an updated resume** that highlights the experience and skills relevant to the program(s) you are applying to. Don't limit your resume to academic pursuits—include extracurricular activities, job experience, and honors.

6. **E-mail a draft of your personal statement** or "statement of purpose". This is very welcome because it can give your professor a sense of your career interests and goals.

7. **Drop off the following at the FCS office** after you have e-mailed the three documents above:

- ☑ Your **portfolio** so professors can look at it, if they so desire.
- ☑ *If needed,* the appropriate number of originally **signed waiver forms** (first page of the paper-based AND recommendation form) for each professor. Note that letters for students who do not waive

their right to view them are taken less seriously or ignored. Please do not bring any mailing envelopes.

8. **Send a thank you note.** After each professor has notified you when the letter(s) is/are ready for pick up or have been mailed, thank her formally. Faculty can spend several hours constructing a single letter; it's nice to be acknowledged. And don't forget to send a brief email to let each professor who wrote you a letter whether you got into the program(s) you are applying to!

In summary, to start this process, here is a checklist of what to do:

- ☑ Meet with your professor before the end of final exams autumn quarter
- ☑ E-mail the information in #4 above (in a Word document) by January 1
- ☑ E-mail your resume and draft of personal statement by January 1
- ☑ If applicable, drop off the signed AND waiver forms and your portfolio at the FCS office

Common Mistakes to Avoid:

1. **Never assume** that a professor will be willing to write you a letter. Always ask first, even if the professor has written a letter for you in the past. You should also ask for permission each and every time you want to list a professor's name as a reference on an application, even if no letter is required.

2. **Don't just drop off forms and info** with the FCS office assistant or send a brief e-mail —meet with the professor in person, in her office, to discuss your qualifications, your choice of programs, the requirements, the deadlines.

3. **Don't harass professors** about whether they have sent the letter(s) yet, unless they ask you to send a reminder. The professor will send you an e-mail to confirm that the letter is completed.