

HOW TO ASK FOR A REFERENCE LETTER

Ask the Most Appropriate Person Available

Don't ask your cousin or your parents' dog walker for a recommendation. Ask someone relevant to the scholarship for which you are applying. For example, if volunteer work is among the scholarship's criteria, ask your supervisor from the organization where you volunteered.

Be Punctual & Considerate

Don't wait until the last minute and give the person helping you out a day or two to complete the letter. As soon as you know you are going to apply for a scholarship that requires a letter of recommendation, aim to ask them for letters AT LEAST four to six weeks BEFORE recommendations are due. Whenever possible make appointments to discuss your scholarship application plans in person (or by phone, if necessary) with your prospective recommenders. If you cannot meet or speak write a clear, informative e-mail. Tell them what scholarship you are applying for, and why, and ask them candidly if they would be willing to write a letter for you. Also be sure to provide them with accurate information about deadlines and submission procedures. If there are forms they should fill out, provide them with those forms. Let them know if the recommendations are to be submitted on-line.

All But write it For Them

Give your recommender enough material so that it will be quick and easy for them to accept. Provide your recommender with an updated resume listing your most recent activities and accomplishments. Let them know of any experiences that you believe make you a well-qualified candidate for the particular scholarship you are applying for.

Bring Materials - and That Includes Stamps

Whatever you do, don't make the person writing this letter for you hunt for stamps or an oversized envelope (much less buy them!). Be appreciative of their time and effort and show it by being as prepared and gracious as possible.

Follow Up

It can be extremely helpful if one or more of your recommenders also provide feedback on your application essays or proposals; ask if they would read a draft and provide constructive criticism and suggestions.

Mind Your Manners

Your recommenders will invest considerable time and thought in preparing your letters, so write them thank you notes and be sure to let them know the outcome of your application. Paper thank you notes or cards are always appreciated!