



## GETTING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL

Recommendations rank among the most important items in your admissions file. In many cases, they are the most important, making or breaking many an application. So start thinking about them as soon as possible. The whole process of identifying good recommenders, lining them up, and then making sure they follow through with winning letters can take a lot of time.

If you're still in college or a recent grad, your college professors will likely make the best references. This is especially true if you're going on to study the same subject in grad school.

### Make it personal.

Choose people who like you, and who think you're good at what you do. Choose good writers who can express their opinions clearly. If a potential recommender seems less than enthusiastic in any way, keep looking. That person's ambivalence is likely to come through in the letter.

The more personalized and detailed your letters are, the better. So invest the time to make your recommenders' job as easy as possible. Try to set up an appointment or lunch interview to discuss your grad school interests with each letter writer. At these interviews, review your academic performance and see what other information they'd like. Providing copies of your papers, portfolios of your work, and the like will help writers make their letters as focused and specific as possible.

Provide your recommenders with all the info, forms, stamped and addressed envelopes they'll need. Make sure they're aware of deadlines and follow up later. By all means, give them as much time as possible. Writing a good reference takes time and your recommenders will likely have other competing demands for time—and other recommendations to write. Keep your recommendation writers on schedule. Provide a gentle reminder when a deadline is approaching. Pave the way for this reminder when you first ask for the recommendation by mentioning a date for a follow-up call. And, of course, a thank-you letter at the end of the process is always appreciated.

### A big name doesn't necessarily equal a big gain.

Finally, letters from big-name scholars can certainly get admissions committees' attention. But the usefulness of a letter from Prof. Supernova, who can't quite place your face, not to mention your abilities, is questionable.

#### Consider these questions:

Ask yourself these questions when considering potential recommenders:

- ✓ Have you worked closely with this person?
- ✓ Do you feel this person thinks favorably of you?
- ✓ Does this person know you in more than one context? (e.g., work plus an activity?)
- ✓ Does this person know that you intended to go to grad school?
- ✓ Is this person an effective narrative writer?
- ✓ If this person knows you from previous rather than current experiences, have you kept in touch?
- ✓ Will this person complete your recommendation letter by the deadline you give?