

HOW TO ASK FOR A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

GENERAL THOUGHTS FROM BSSA COUNSELORS

- IF YOU KNOW YOUR PROFESSOR WELL this will be easy. If you do not, GET TO KNOW HIM OR HER.
 - They will put in as much effort as you will. You put in the time to get to know them; they will put in the time to write you an excellent letter.
 - If you cannot approach them, either make it so you can, or choose someone else.
- HOW TO GET TO KNOW YOUR PROFESSORS
 - Sit on the front row, and in the same area for all lectures
 - Actively participate in class
 - Introduce yourself to your professor at the first class
 - Go to office hours frequently/on a regular basis
 - Go prepared to discuss the course, your research, their research, ask questions, even if you know the answers, anything interesting. Professor office hours are for students. Take advantage of their availability.
 - Answer or Challenge questions
- HOW TO ASK
 - Start with an email or phone message and request for a meeting to formally ask for a letter of recommendation
 - Identify yourself, how you know the professor, and what you want from them.
 - If they do not respond immediately to your email, don't panic, they are very busy individuals. Allow a week or two and follow up again by email or in person.
 - Choose carefully whom to email, since if the professor doesn't know you, it is easy to just respond back no.
 - BE DIRECT AND HONEST—
 - Don't beat around the bush, they know why you are there.
 - They are direct; ask them directly "Do you feel you can write me a STRONG letter of recommendation?" Not just any letter but a STRONG letter.
 - Once a meeting is set :
 - Be prepared and go in as if it were an interview. Dress appropriately/professional
 - If the professor has already said yes and asked you to bring the paperwork do so at this time.
 - What you should provide them
 - UCI waiver form and if applicable other letter of recommendation forms from other application services (such as PharmCAS, OptomCAS, CASPA forms).
 - If the other forms are not available to you at the time, inform the professor you will be providing the forms to them ASAP on ... date.
 - (TIP: HSAC can only accept letters and approved centralized application letter forms. Check HSAC Policies and FAQ link to see what these forms

are, which forms can be accepted by our office and which forms need to be mailed directly from professor to admissions).

- Other than letters of recommendation forms you should not need to provide additional materials, however some professors may require more paperwork, ie transcripts or a personal statement.
 - Provide it if asked, but be careful with the personal statement— recommenders are to write about their OWN knowledge of you, not the history that you have already written in your personal statement.
 - Some students have taken cover letters, academic resumes or a CV.
 - You can offer to provide postage and an address label with HSAC address already on it. Letters coming from UCI staff/faculty do not need postage because it can be sent through inner campus mail. However if your recommender is off campus be sure to offer postage. (TIP: use a larger address label so the label isn't lost after you give it to your professor)
 - Remind the professors that the letters need to be TYPED, on their own letterhead, and sent in their own letterhead envelopes. (Additional instructions are also on the UCI waiver form).
- GIVE THEM A DEADLINE AND ALWAYS FOLLOW UP
- A reasonable deadline to write the letter is 30 days. Give a specific date so that you know when you can follow up. Even with deadlines be prepared for delays.
 - Use proper etiquette or manners when following up. Be polite and **patient**.
 - Have a backup plan. Sometimes things don't go as you plan. If your recommender has not written your letter after several follow up attempts and your deadline is fast approaching. You may find yourself needing to look for another recommender or completing your packet without the letter. (Check with a LOR advisor for recommendations.
 - Once the letter has arrived be sure to thank your recommender. A simple thank you card is sufficient.

WHAT IF I REALLY DON'T KNOW ANY OF MY PROFESSORS???

- Remember that you are competing with other applicants that will make the effort to get to know their professor.
- To be a strong applicant you will need to be active and make the initiative.
- Combat your fears and make the effort. The best time to start is at the beginning of a new class.
- If you pressure a professor to write you a letter even if they have shown hesitation or told you that they don't really know you, you are unlikely to receive a quality letter. A letter that only states how strong of an applicant you are based solely on grades will show admissions you failed to get to know your recommender.

Remember, your letters are painting a picture for admissions to get to know you better.