

DO's and DON'T's of Letters of Recommendation

DO's

1. Choose professors who: (a) taught you recently, (b) know you well as a student, (c) you did well in their class(es), and (d) ideally, are full-time, permanent professors at their institutions.
2. Give your letter writers plenty of notice. Ideally, at least 4-6 weeks where possible.
3. Always agree to waive your right to access your letters.
4. Provide your letter writers with practical details, including: (a) a due date, (b) where they need to send it, (c) how they need to send it, and (d) who they should address the letter to (if known).
5. Inform them of all of the schools that you are applying to that you would like them to submit a letter for, including the details in (4) above for each.
6. Provide your letter writers with helpful information about you, including: (a) a copy of your transcripts, (b) any work you did for them, (c) any other work that you feel would help them get a full picture of you as a student, (d) a copy of your personal statement or personal essay for the relevant school(s) even if they are in draft form, and (e) what you found valuable about their teaching, their class(es).
7. Wait 5-7 days to follow up if you have not heard back from them.
8. Seek guidance from CPE staff if at any point you feel unsure about what to do.

DON'Ts

1. Provide less than two week's notice to your letter writers.
2. Assume that their answer is yes.
3. Repeatedly follow up if they do not reply to you. Move on to another choice.
4. Ask more people than the school you're applying to allows.
5. Have a CPE staff member as your only letter writer. It is important to have professors who taught your classes. You should only use a CPE staff member under certain circumstances.