

How to ask for Letters of Recommendation for Grad School

Dr. Ann Fischer (Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2004)

When you ask a professor for letters of recommendation to graduate schools, please make sure you allow at least **one month** or more of lead time before the first letter is due. Also, plan to give the following support items to her/him, preferably all at once in an organized packet:

1. A vita or resume, including all relevant research, volunteer, and work experience. Please be specific about exactly what you did/are doing in each position (e.g., for research experience, did you collect questionnaire data, enter data, conduct interviews?). For any psychology-related volunteer and work experience, please say a bit about how it might have helped prepare you for the specific field of psychology you are pursuing.
2. A listing of GRE scores (verbal, quant, and psych), overall GPA, and GPA in psych classes only (this may already be included on your vita, which is fine).
3. A copy of your personal statement or at least a paragraph about your educational goals and interests.
4. A note about anything in particular this professor might be able to highlight about you in her/his letter. For example, some professors might have supervised your research and can talk about your potential as a researcher, while others might only have seen your classroom performance. What would be most helpful for this person to add?
5. A listing of each program (and type of program, e.g., Ph.D. in counseling psych, M.A. in cognitive psych) you want letters sent to, along with the due dates for each letter (in reverse chronological order, so put the program with the earliest due dates on top).
6. For each program to which you are applying, include (1) any reference form the school may want to have completed by your recommender; you should type in any information possible, including the recommender's address, and (2) a **stamped, addressed envelope** for actually sending the letter. Or if the program wants you to include all the letters in one application coming from you, then indicate that to the letter writer and make arrangements to pick up your letter(s).
7. Though certainly not required, you should consider signing the waiver of your right to see your letters (if you don't waive this right, people sometimes think it is because you have something to hide).
8. Give your letter-writers an electronic version (e.g., disk or e-mail) of all the schools' mailing addresses. That makes it much easier to get the individual letters ready, with cutting and pasting of the addresses.
9. Please remember that the person writing letters for you is probably also writing letters for several other students at the same time. So the easier you make it for the professor, the better the chances of everything running smoothly and all your materials getting in by the deadlines.