Getting that Letter of Rec

Asking for a letter of recommendation is one of the most anxiety-inducing tasks I’ve ever completed. When it comes to getting letters of recommendation, students are often nervous because they don’t know who, when, why, or how to ask for letters. I would like to say that even when you have a potential letter writer in mind, the task itself is nerve-wracking because they still might say no. It is key to go into the situation with a positive attitude. Be friendly, polite, and be confident.

Let’s get straight to the point. I’ll keep this simple.

Who to Ask for Letters of Recommendation:

- Professors
- Faculty
- Supervisors

Who NOT to Ask for Letters of Recommendation:

- Family
- Friends
- High School teachers
- Influential people who do not know you well

Pretty straight forward, right? There is one thing you definitely need to remember when seeking out people to write your letters of recommendation: this is for law school. Law school is writing intensive, typically comes with a heavy reading load, and requires determination, dedication, and perseverance. So should you ask your current English 1302 professor who you’ve never met face-to-face? No. Ask professors, faculty, and supervisors that know you well, can speak to your academic abilities, and who feel comfortable articulating their honest opinions about you.

A word of caution on asking supervisors: some schools do not accept letters of recommendation from people other than academic professors unless you have been out of school for over five years. Be sure to read each schools’ requirements with care.

Hot Tip: LSAC also sends letter writers a survey to rate items they are interested in specifically. Make sure you pick people who know you well!

When should you ask for letters of recommendation? Ideally, you will have your letters submitted prior to your application submissions. When you ask for letters is a personal choice. LSAC will hold on to those letters as valid for a full year at minimum. The true “when” is how
soon before the deadline should you reach out to a letter writer? Respectfully give your letter writer no less than two weeks’ notice (and I personally think that’s pushing it). Ideally, you will give your letter writer at least a full month.

It is important to remember why you are asking for these letters of recommendation. You may think admissions won’t read every letter of recommendation they receive, and you’re probably right. However, don’t assume your letters won’t be drawn and read. Letters of recommendation give law schools a third party perspective on who you are as a person and student. These letters are to showcase the best parts of yourself verified by someone else. Think about why you want these letters from these specific writers. Do you want a professor to mention your writing skills? Do you want a supervisor to highlight your ability to maintain a job and your 3.5 GPA? Know why you want a person to be a writer prior to asking.

That brings us to the “how.” How does one ask for a letter of recommendation? It ultimately depends on your relationship with the potential letter writer, but there are some professional options.

· Email

  o If you choose to email your writer, do so in a professional manner. If it is someone you have not seen in a while, re-introduce yourself to jog their memories of you. Address them appropriately, attach a copy of your resume, and be specific. Tell your writer precisely what you would like them to write about. For example, “would you feel comfortable writing me a letter of recommendation that speaks to my ability to ____?”

· In-Person

  o This would be the best way to approach a potential writer. Set up a time to meet with your potential letter writer in person. Bring a physical copy of your resume to present to your writer along with a written version of your prompt. If you’re meeting in person, be professional through your attire and demeanor.

There are other ways to go about asking for letters, but students will most likely email or meet with their writer in-person. The main take-away is to keep it professional and be specific regardless of how you choose to ask for a letter. Know who you are asking, your deadlines, and your reasoning.

-Alex-Marie Baez