

# ASPIREOFFICE

## *Six Steps for Securing Effective Letters of Recommendation*

### Step 1: Forge Relationships

In order to obtain strong letters of recommendation, you must put in time to **develop and nurture relationships with potential recommenders**. Do not be “a face in the crowd” in your classes; go to your professors’ office hours, ask questions in class, try to get to know them and let them get to know you. Asking for their advice on your research projects, potential courses to take, or your future academic and career plans are great ways to form a personal relationship. If you are shy, you can use email as a tool for getting to know your professors. Ask them questions about the course material, or send them links to news items that remind you of material that you have covered in class.

For professional references, try to anticipate and meet your supervisor’s needs and meet regularly with him or her to evaluate your performance. This way, you’ll know that they can provide you with a positive and thoughtful recommendation.



### Step 2: Research and Plan

A crucial step to obtaining an effective letter of recommendation is to clearly **follow the instructions** provided by the graduate school or scholarship foundation to which you are applying. Make sure you know how many letters of recommendation you are supposed to submit, and make sure that you are asking the right person to write for you. If an application asks for an “academic” reference, ask a professor, and if it asks for a “professional” reference, ask a supervisor.

Plan on timing your request so that you give your recommender enough time to write you a strong letter; **two to three months in advance is ideal**. If a letter writer has plenty of time to prepare a letter and is not asked at the last minute, you are more likely to get a glowing recommendation.



### Step 3: Contact

Once you have selected the people you would like letters from, **reach out to them**. You are more likely to be successful if you include in your request a clear description of what the letter is for, its deadline, and directions on how to submit.

When you approach potential letter writers, be ready to sometimes hear “no” as an answer. Faculty members and work-place supervisors are usually extremely busy people and may not feel comfortable writing letters of recommendation for students they do not know well. If you hear a “no,” gracefully accept and ask someone else.



## Step 4: Provide the Tools

Schedule appointments with your recommenders and **provide the following** to each of them:

- (1) Information about the program, why you are interested in this program, and how it will contribute to your academic or career goals
- (2) Information about the eligibility criteria and desired qualities of applicants for the specific program
- (3) A draft of your personal statement
- (4) A current resume
- (5) A transcript (if applicable)
- (6) A reminder of what semester you had a class with your recommender and the grade you earned for the course
- (7) Finally, be sure to provide instructions to the recommender about when and how to submit the letter, and agree on a deadline. Is the letter of reference supposed to be in electronic or paper form? Will the reference letter be uploaded or pasted in to the program portal? Don't forget to include a self-addressed envelope with postage if applicable.

If you fill out a letter request form, be sure to check the box waiving your right to view the letter. Many programs will not consider letters that are not confidential, and many recommenders, even those who intend to write you an excellent recommendation, will not write one unless it is confidential.



## Step 5: Remind Politely

Contact your recommenders approximately **two weeks in advance** of the deadline to remind them. While students are sometimes worried this will seem like "nagging," busy faculty and professionals tend to sincerely appreciate the reminder. Be courteous and ask if they have any additional questions or need any additional information from you. It is a good idea to send another polite reminder **a few days before** your letter is due. Despite good intentions, even the most conscientious of recommenders may occasionally forget about a deadline.



## Step 6: Say Thank You

After the letter of recommendation has been submitted, **send a thank you note or email**. Not only is this small expression of gratitude the right thing to do, but it may help the recommender say "yes" again the next time you need a letter!

Finally, make sure to **follow-up** and let them know what happens with your application!

For more information, please visit [aspire.wvu.edu](http://aspire.wvu.edu) or contact the ASPIRE Office at [aspire@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:aspire@mail.wvu.edu)