**Asking for Letters of Recommendation**

Letters of recommendation are a critical element in your application for graduate school or that new job. Your goal is to not only get a recommendation, but to get a GOOD one. Asking for a last-minute recommendation in the wrong way can result in a "no" or a less-than-stellar letter. Here are a few tips for making sure you get the strongest letter possible.

**Who to Ask:**

Be strategic! Most graduate programs and jobs require more than one letter of recommendation, so aim to create a diverse set of recommendation letters that speak to all your skills and strengths, particularly those that are directly relevant to the program/job you are seeking. You will want the package of letters to touch upon your academic skills, research skills and experiences if any, and any practical learning experiences you’ve had (Environmental Leadership Program, internships, study abroad, related work experiences, etc.)

You should seek letters from:

- Professors who can speak to your academic skills. This means faculty from whom you’ve taken one or more relevant classes. Obviously, it is best to pick the classes you did the best in, and the courses that gave you knowledge and skills relevant to the program/job you are applying for.
- Professors who can speak to your research skills. This might be faculty you’ve taken classes from or worked for in their lab.
- Professors who have worked with you on an honors thesis, independent project, or other practical learning experience.
- Also consider job supervisors and volunteer supervisors as well.
- In all of these cases, you are seeking people who can speak to the quality of your work (writing, speaking, critical thinking, etc.) and particular skills relevant to the program/job you are applying to.

As a general rule, you should avoid letters from friends, roommates, parents, siblings. No matter how good they are, they won’t be given as much weight. Likewise, obtaining a letter from your major adviser will not be as strong as obtaining one from a faculty member from whom you’ve taken a class and who can speak to the quality of your work!

**Steps:**

- Do not wait until the last minute! You should give at least three weeks notice for a letter.
- Sign up for an appointment to meet with the professor or visit their office hours to ask for the letter. Prepare for this meeting and get all your information ready and organized.
- Share why you are applying for the job/graduate program, and explain why you are well-qualified.
- Ask the professor if they would be willing to write you a letter that would support your application to grad school. Do not ever list someone as a reference without first asking them!
- Many letters are now submitted electronically so you can track the status of your applications directly online. In cases where you cannot, you should ask your recommender how it is best to
keep in touch about the status of your letter. Most professors will not mind a friendly email reminder.

- It is always good to send a hand-written thank you note once they’ve written you a letter.

**What to Include in your Request:**
To comply with federal law, UO faculty need a written request that includes the following information:

1. What specific information is to be discussed (e.g. classes you took, grades you received, your ranking, any other information you wish them to share relevant to your performance)
2. To whom the information is to be released (list of schools, including the specific program and degree you are applying for and addresses)
3. The purpose for which the information is to be released (graduate school applications, job application, scholarship application, etc.)
4. Your signature and date (this is the critical piece!)

**You should also provide:**
- Whether submission is electronic or via hardcopy
  - If electronic - include email address or weblink
  - If hard copy – include the forms and a stamped and addressed envelope
- Short blurb on the programs or job to which you are applying
- A copy of your statement of purpose (if you have one, this will help your recommender write a much stronger letter of support since they can tailor their language to reflect your goals/interests)
- List of courses you’ve taken from that person, the grade you received, and any relevant information regarding the work you did (research paper topic, etc.)
- A copy of your transcripts
- Short list of relevant information useful to highlight in the letter – this includes relevant classes you’ve taken, internships, work experience, etc. that would be good to highlight.

**Issues to Consider**
- Letters of recommendation are confidential, so you shouldn’t ask to see a copy.
- Likewise, most letters of recommendation forms give you the option of waiving your right to see your letters. If you do not waive your right you will be able to obtain copies of your letters. This means your recommender might not be as candid in your evaluation, and thus, it won’t be considered as strong of a letter.

**Some more Helpful Information:**

http://www.wikihow.com/Ask-Your-Professor-for-a-Letter-of-Recommendation-Via-Email

http://gradschool.about.com/od/askingforletters/a/askletter.htm