

Requesting a Letter of Recommendation

It is likely that at some point during your college career, you will need a letter of recommendation. While your professors will be happy to support you as you apply for various opportunities, there are several things that you can do to make the process easier for them (and also for you!). It is helpful to start thinking and planning early so that when you do need a letter of recommendation, you are prepared to request it.

Who to Ask

For academic applications, a letter of recommendation from a professor will be most effective, though in some cases (i.e. applications for internships or jobs) letters from administrative staff or professional colleagues may also be a good option. For academic recommendations, you will want to consider professors who work in subject areas that are relevant to your future academic or professional goals, but also professors with whom you have developed a good relationship, even if their work is in a different subject area. When professors are familiar with students' work in the classroom as well as their personal strengths and extracurricular involvement, they are generally able to write stronger, more compelling letters of recommendation. Take the time now to get to know your professors (while of course being considerate of their demanding schedules), attend events, and generally build your network.

When to Ask

It is important to give your recommender an appropriate amount of time to complete the letter of recommendation. A letter of recommendation often takes between one to two hours for a professor to craft, so it is a significant expenditure of time. Generally, you should give him or her at least two weeks to write the letter, though more time is almost always appreciated (up to four weeks when possible). If you give your recommender four weeks' notice or more, it can be helpful to send a gentle reminder email closer to the deadline, asking if they need any additional information from you to complete the letter. If you know further in advance that you may need a letter, you can let your recommender know that it is a possibility and that you will follow up with them once you know for sure.

How to Ask

In addition to thinking about who you should ask for a recommendation letter and when, it is important to think about how to ask for it. In general, you want to make the process as easy and straightforward for your recommender as possible.

Students sometimes worry that by asking for a recommendation letter, they are inconveniencing their recommender. Keep in mind that professors and administrative staff at Yale-NUS want to support you in your endeavors, and they expect to be asked to write recommendation letters. There is no need to feel bad about asking for a letter, as long as you ask in a way that is respectful.

As a first step, you will want to ask your recommender in person if they feel that they would be able to write you a letter. Try to find a good time to ask, and avoid approaching your recommender if they are rushing off to a meeting or appear too busy. Asking your recommender if they would feel comfortable writing you a recommendation letter (rather than asking directly if they will) allows them to say no if they are not in a

position to do so, or if their schedule is too tight. In most cases, however, your recommender will be happy to write you a letter. Once they agree, follow up promptly via email with the details of the request. It is very important to put **all of the relevant information in one email**. This will allow your recommender to refer back to just one place when they sit down to write the letter. Here is what the email should include:

1. The **full name of the program(s)** to which you are applying along with a **complete address** of each institution (even if it is an on-line submission), and the nature of the program, scholarship, or fellowship. Include the relevant web link if possible. You will also want to explain very briefly (1-2 sentences) in the body of the email why you are interested in this opportunity and how you see it fitting in with your future academic or professional goals.
2. The **exact due date** for submission of the letter.
3. Instructions on **where and how to send the letter**: should it be submitted online or by mail? Should it be given to you to submit (and if so, should it be in a signed and sealed envelope?), or sent directly to the program?
4. Any **statement of purpose** you will submit to the program.
5. A **current CV or resume**.
6. A **current transcript** (optional; an informal transcript is acceptable).
7. Any other **accomplishments or attributes** of yours that you think might be helpful for the recommender to be aware of when writing the letter.

After the Letter is Written

In the rush of submitting an application, it can be easy to forget one of the most important parts of the recommendation letter process. The way that you interact with your recommender after the letter is written is important, though, and will undoubtedly influence their willingness to provide letters of recommendation for you again in the future. Two tips to keep in mind:

1. After the letter is submitted, be sure to thank your recommender in writing. While an email will suffice, a handwritten thank you card will show an additional personal touch and will be much appreciated by your recommender.
2. Keep your recommender updated on the status of your application and your future plans. If you are accepted to the program you applied for, your recommender will be very pleased to hear this. If you are not accepted, it is still important to let your recommender know and to express your appreciation for their help with your application. In that case, it may be appropriate to ask your recommender for guidance or advice on next steps, or to let them know what your new plans are.

Following these steps will make the process of requesting a letter of recommendation easier and more effective, and will ultimately result in stronger letters of recommendation and better relationships with your recommenders. Good luck with your applications!