

MEMORANDUM: Letters of Recommendation  
TO: All Graduate Students  
FROM: Gregory Fried, Philosophy Department  
DATE: October 2019

This set of guidelines is designed to help students through the process of requesting and using letters of recommendation. If students follow the steps outlined below, they will help ensure that their letters arrive in a timely and efficient manner and that these letters will be as detailed and convincing as possible. The key is to make the process as smooth as possible for your letter-writer. Not every one of these items applies to all letters of recommendation, so check with your recommender.

- 1) **Confidentiality and waiving your rights:** Remember that most employers and academic programs expect that recommendation letters will be written in confidence, meaning that you will not be able to see these letters. Often, the programs or employers will supply you with a form to waive your right to see your letters of recommendation, which you should sign. Of course, you *may* decline to waive that right, but understand that if you do that, the employer or program will not take the letter very seriously.
- 2) **Job or position description:** When possible, provide a formal description that the employer has posted, either copy and send it or give a link to it.
- 3) **Names and addresses:** If you are applying to specific positions or programs, provide your letter-writer with a complete list of addresses so that your writer can properly address the letter. If there is a person's name to whom the letter should be addressed, include that, too.
- 4) **Due-dates:** Make sure you let the letter-writer know the *specific* dates when letters are due.
- 5) **Mailing:** If your letter-writer must mail your letter, provide an envelope, complete with the address to which the letter needs to go, as well as stamps (check if needed).
- 6) **Your courses with the letter-writer:** If you took courses from your letter-writer, remind him or her what those courses were, when you took them, and what grades you received. This helps locate the proper records. Remind them of any special memories or achievements.
- 7) **Copies of your work:** Provide copies of the best work you did for the letter-writer — preferably copies that the letter-writer corrected, with comments, as a reminder of his or her assessment of how you performed in the course. (Keep your papers!)
- 8) **Your resumé, CV, and related items:** Provide your resumé or the like, so your letter writer can get a full sense of your qualifications, plus any other relevant information, such as:
  - a. **Goal statement:** For grad programs and some positions, you will need to provide a goal statement. Provide that to your letter-writer.
  - b. **Research statement:** For academic positions, you will need a description of your research: what you *have done*, what you *are doing*, as well as your *future trajectory*.
  - c. **Teaching excellence:** For academic positions, you will usually need a description of your approach to teaching. Provide that and, if you have it, evidence of your excellence as teacher.
  - d. **Service:** For many positions, evidence of service to departments and programs (both in academia and outside it) can be an important consideration.

- 9) **Fill out forms:** In general, if there are forms (on-line or on paper) to be filled out with things like your address, student ID number, etc., make sure that you do these. *Do not expect your letter-writer to do it for you.* Remember that your letter-writer may not have this information, and so your failure to supply it may result in your letter being late.
- 10) **Advance notice:** If at all possible, avoid asking for letters on short notice. Be sure to ask personally by email or in person. Minimally, requests should be made a month in advance.
- 11) **Reminders and checking in:** Your letter-writer may be very busy. Be sure to remind them (politely!) about due-dates. You can also check with the employer that all your letters are in.