

A Step-by-Step Guide to Obtaining an Outstanding Letter of Recommendation

The letter of recommendation is the counselors and teachers opportunity to highlight a student's most impressive characteristics. This, however, cannot be done without the student's help: adhere to the following guidelines, and you are guaranteed to succeed!

STEP 1: Review each of your applications and determine what letters of recommendation, if any, are needed.

STEP 2: Decide from whom you will request letters of recommendation for each application. Remember, your favorite teacher might not be the most appropriate source for a letter. Ideally, you should choose teachers from no more than 1 year prior to the current academic year, preferably those who teach academic courses. *The best choice, however, is always the teacher who knows you well, can speak most accurately about your best classroom contributions, and will write you a personalized, glowingly positive letter of recommendation.*

STEP 3: Prepare your "Request for a Letter of Recommendation" materials (see chart on back).

STEP 4: If you want the letter sent directly to the college or organization, supply a stamped envelope addressed to the college or organization.

STEP 5: Place all of your Letter of Recommendation materials in a file folder or envelope. On the front of the folder, write the following information: "Letter of Recommendation for (your name). Due (due date). Mail directly OR Return to Ms. Boyer"

STEP 6: Submit the request and assembled materials to Ms. Boyer in the middle office. She will let you know if additional information is required.

What Colleges Look for in Letters of Recommendation	
When deciding who to ask for a recommendation it is important to consider what colleges, or organizations, are looking for in the letter. In the space provided, identify an adult who would have something positive to say about you in relation to each of the topics.	
Topic	Possible Letter Writer
Classroom Contributions Your ability to ask good questions, your accomplishments on special projects, and how your contributions help others in the classroom.	
Interest in Learning Your passion for particular subject areas, your work ethic, your motivation and your general love of learning.	
Academic Achievement Your academic ability (not necessarily just your grades) as well as how you compare to other students the letter writer has taught.	
Personal Challenges or Hardships Circumstances in your life that may have made your educational pursuits more difficult.	
Personal Anecdotes & Specific Examples Anecdotes that illustrate something meaningful about your character.	
Impact on School The various ways you have contributed to the school community through your activities.	
Leadership Ability Your leadership within a specific activity (e.g., student government, clubs, publications, etc.)	
Interests Outside School The importance of your activities outside school (e.g., community service, church, part-time work, etc.)	

Request for a Letter of Recommendation: Materials

The STEM "Request Form"

- This is non-negotiable! You must complete a request form for *every* letter you request.

Information about the school or organization to which you are applying

- The exact name of the organization or college
- The name of the individual or office to receive the letter
- A brief statement about why you are interested in this particular college/program (or how you are qualified for this particular scholarship)

A copy of your résumé, which should include the following information on one page:

- Your name, address, phone number, e-mail address
- Honors, awards, special recognition
- Athletics, clubs, extracurricular activities, & community service (be sure to include any leadership positions)
- Summer activities
- Employment
- Personal interests & special talents

An up-to-date copy of your unofficial transcript

- Include any SAT, ACT, and AP test scores

Self-reflection (2-3 pages, typed) on the following:

- Academic Background
 - What is your favorite aspect of STEM (or a specific class)? What have you learned that has made a difference? For what reasons do you feel your teachers and underclassmen at Lithia will remember you after graduation?
 - What are your major academic strengths? How are these reflected in the courses you have taken, extra projects you have completed, and/or awards you have received?
 - Briefly describe any extenuating circumstances or hardships you and/or your family have had to overcome, especially those that may have affected your grades. AND/OR Discuss any challenges you have faced and explain how you have overcome them.
 - For the class in which the writer taught you: How were you engaged in class interactions (participation, preparation, etc.)? What did you contribute that was significant? What specific aspects of this class or the way it was taught were enjoyable and helped you learn?
- Extracurricular, Community Involvement, Work Experiences
 - Describe, *in detail*, your most significant extracurricular achievement. How much time do you put into it (hours per week, weeks per year, etc.)? What do you love about this activity and what have you gained from this involvement?
 - What have been your most significant community service contributions? What awards/honors in this area have been most meaningful to you and why? How has your involvement in this activity affected you?
 - What have you learned as a result of your work experiences or jobs?
- Personal Qualities
 - What are your strongest values? Cite examples of times you have displayed them.
 - What do you consider to be your most distinct personality traits? What do you believe makes you unique? What makes you different from every other college applicant? Give examples that illustrate these particular traits.
- Miscellaneous
 - Describe your family. What impact has your family had on making you who you are?
 - Describe any unique summer and/or travel experiences you have had in the past few years.
 - What do you hope to accomplish in college (and beyond)?
 - What else do you want to include that will set you apart from other applicants?

STEP 7: Mark on your calendar the date you need to give a "friendly reminder" to the letter writer (this should be about four days before the letter is due).

NOTE: Before reminding your letter writer, check with Ms. Boyer to see if the letter has been submitted— *a reminder may not be necessary!*

STEP 8: After you have received the letter of recommendation, or the letter has been submitted, send the writer a thank-you note. He/she will appreciate it, and chances are you will need to request another letter later in the year.

STEP 9: Call the admissions office at each destination school or program to confirm that all documents, including your letters of recommendation, arrive before the deadline.