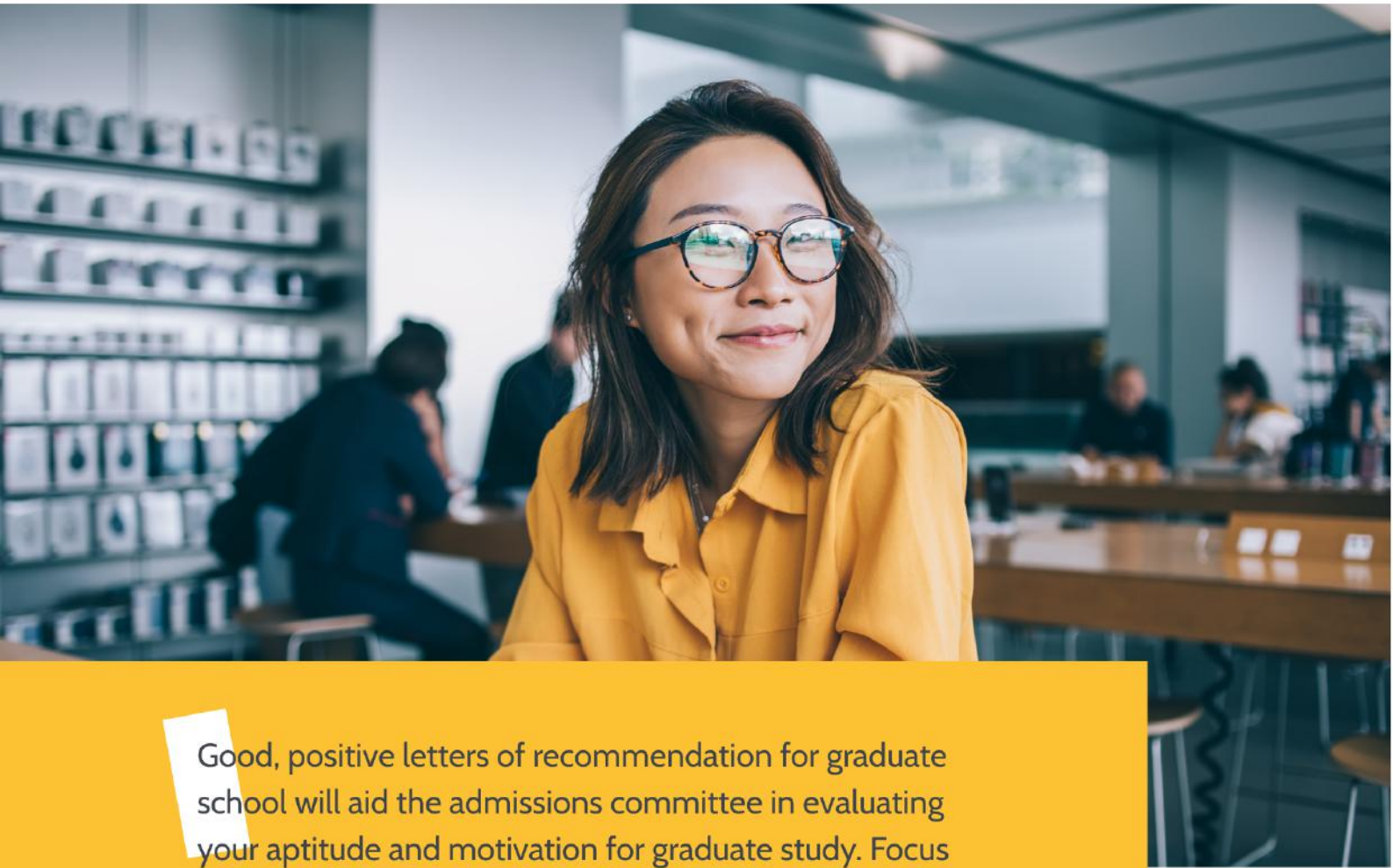




**How to prepare a  
Letter of Recommendation  
for Grad School**





Good, positive letters of recommendation for graduate school will aid the admissions committee in evaluating your aptitude and motivation for graduate study. Focus on choosing the person who is able to comment on your qualifications for graduate study and can show your characteristics such as creativity, originality, independence, and research capability. Make sure the letter tells the distinctive and unique things that you have done as a student and attests your value by showing your personality through real stories and valuable insights for the admission committee.

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# How To Ask a Professor For a Letter Of Recommendation For Grad School

An important part of the admissions process for graduate school, now more than ever in a time when in-person interviews aren't possible, is the letter of recommendation. The admissions process is about figuring out who you are as a candidate, and you want to put together a grad school application that shows who you are and why your graduate application is different from the others they are reading. It can feel like the letter of recommendation is the one piece of an application that is out of your control, but that doesn't mean that it's just left up to chance. There are many things you can do to help ensure that you get a recommendation letter that is the perfect addition to your grad school application—something that enhances who you are as a candidate, helps articulate aspects of your personality that

might otherwise be missing, and describes your approach to academic life in a way that is both useful and applicable to your application for graduate school at large.

At first, you may feel intimidated when you think about asking for a recommendation letter for your application for grad school, but there's no need to worry! It is natural to feel overwhelmed at asking someone to write a recommendation letter, but anyone in academia is used to being asked to write or edit letters of recommendation when students are preparing applications, especially for grad school, so the most important thing is to make sure that you're asking the right person and you're asking in the right way. Let's start at the beginning.



# What to consider when determining which professor to ask for a recommendation letter:

## Who knows you as a student?

Who have you interacted with on a regular basis? Is there a course where you've regularly attended office hours? Did you have an opportunity to work directly on a project with anyone?

## Area of study

What are you going to study? It's not as simple as saying you're putting together an application for grad school to study history so you need someone in that field to write your letter. It's more about being thoughtful in your approach and setting the stage for that. For example, maybe you are putting together a graduate application for a computer science program but you are a history major at present. Then perhaps it's valuable to consider someone you've studied under in a math or science subject, which could show your facility with new areas outside of your initial concentration.

## Don't worry too much about prominence or notability

It can be tempting to ask the most notable or the most prominent person in your field that you've interacted with, but the most important thing is that your letter is written by someone who knows you and offers something unique to your graduate application. If this person has had more limited interactions with you than someone who is less prominent but actually knows you better, you should go with the person who actually has a point of view on you specifically to add new depth to your application for grad school.

## Who knows you as a person?

In addition to picking someone who knows you better, consider who may be able to help showcase a unique component of your personality. What aspect of who you are is currently not as present in your grad school application? Maybe you've interacted frequently with two people you could ask, but one was able to see you really apply yourself to an area that didn't come naturally to you. This is a great opportunity to help bring specific traits—in this case, determination in the face of adversity—to the forefront of your application, which any graduate admissions committee would love to read about.

Now that you've thought about these things, you should have a better sense of who you might want to ask. With that in mind, let's talk about how to actually go about doing the asking.



## How To Ask A Professor For A Letter Of Recommendation

Once you have figured out exactly what you are asking, then you can finally make the ask. Getting a great letter of recommendation from professors is as much about who you ask as it is how you ask. When it comes to how to ask a professor for a letter of recommendation, here are some tips to keep in mind:

### Key points on how to ask a professor for a recommendation letter:

#### Ask politely but specifically

You want to be clear about what you're hoping for. For example, if you want something that really highlights your leadership abilities and this is someone who can speak to that, don't hesitate to offer that guidance.

#### Be clear that you're asking them to write you an original letter

More and more people these days are being asked to write their own letters of recommendation for applications, especially for grad school, and then are asked to pass them along for signature, but it can be very obvious to the reader that this isn't an outside perspective, so don't hesitate to be clear that you're asking for an original letter to be written on your behalf.

## Phrase your ask in a positive way

Don't be afraid to phrase the question by asking if they are willing to write you a positive letter of recommendation. You would rather have someone say no than have them write something that is not showing you in the most positive light possible.

## Provide some context in writing

Make sure to say a little bit about where you're applying, what you want to pursue, and why. In all likelihood, this person is going to be asked to write more than one letter, and so giving a baseline of information about what your specific circumstances are will not only allow for a more specific letter, but it will also provide a reference when the letter itself is actually being written.

There is no right way to approach the ask itself—some people are more comfortable asking in person, others prefer to email, or you may not have the option to do that and may feel you should ask over the phone. Regardless of the actual communication path you choose to pursue, make sure you give whoever you ask plenty of notice. This way there will be time to put together a thoughtful, considered recommendation letter that doesn't feel generic or rushed.





## Asking a Professor For a Letter Of Recommendation: Summary

Recommendation letters are an important part of the admissions process, and graduate school applications are no different. When it comes to how to ask a professor for a letter of recommendation for grad school, you want to be deliberate, intentional, and clear about your expectations. In general, academics want to write positive recommendation letters for students who work hard to apply themselves and who wish to pursue additional education, so don't be shy! If you are prepared when it comes to asking a professor for a letter of recommendation, you will be able to get what you need for your graduate school application with grace and ease, which will then lead to a higher chance of admission!



**Focus on the positive aspects of your preparation for this degree program**

# Tips for Strong Letter of Recommendation for Graduate School

Applying to the graduate program you need to prepare a set of documents that include recommendation letters. In fact, your application won't be even considered if it doesn't contain letter of recommendation for graduate school. If you are applying to the advanced academic degree you need to have academic recommendation letters from your professor. And if you are applying to the MBA program you need to have letters of recommendation from the manager of the department you are working in – hence, professional recommendations.

## Start Preparing Your Recommendation Letters in Advance

Start preparing your graduate school letters of recommendation as early as possible. It is advisable to prepare them well in advance before applying to graduate school. Think of people with whom you had considerable academic or professional interaction and approach them by asking them to write your recommendation letters. Give time for the recommenders to go over past performance evaluations and remember all the stories about you to write good recommendation letters.

And make sure that your recommender will fill out the necessary form of evaluation and answer the questions that will be provided in the online application to the program you are applying to. These can differ if you are applying to different universities.



## Pick The Right People Who Know the Best Stories

The first thing that you need to address is choosing the person who is going to endorse you for the grad program. The admission rules clearly state that the student is not allowed to write a recommendation letter or influence the person writing the document. That is why you have to choose carefully the person who is familiar with the work that you've done academically or in the workplace.

Your letter writer has to pick the most relevant anecdotes about you to give the faculty admissions the perspective on your achievements and aspirations. The admission committee is not looking at the credentials of the recommender but rather on real stories about you, information on personal experience working with you, an honest graduate school recommendation letter from a person who can address your suitability to the program.

Tip from an expert: the title or status of the recommenders are not important. While it is advisable to show recommendations from academically known professors or CEOs at the company you are working in, the best person to write your recommendation is the one who knows you best. It can be a colleague, a work associate, or a research advisor at the university with whom you have been closely interacting on a regular basis for a long period of time. And for MBA applicants it can even be a major client with whom you had a considerable professional interaction (in case you are applying in confidence).

## Make Sure Your Accomplishments and Strong Qualities are Backed with Examples

The first thing to mention in the recommendation letter is how the recommender knows the student and under which circumstances you two worked together. The letter of recommendation for graduate school should provide the context and nature of the relationship with your recommender. Also, it will be valuable if your recommender will provide additional information about unusual personal or community circumstances to the admission officers.

The recommender describes succinctly your academic success, motivation, and personal ability to perform well in the program you are applying to. But to make your recommendation letter strong it is crucial to include real examples of the characteristics of the applicant mentioned. Providing stories that tell how a student possesses a genuine love for learning, his leadership skills will make you desirable for the university to accept you.

## Avoid Making Common Mistakes in Your Recommendation Letter for Graduate School

### Communicate with your recommender

When you decide on your letter writer it is a great practice to meet with them. Not communicating with the recommender about your academic goals, motivation, plans, ambitions, or career goals will result in a general and vague recommendation letter. Supplement the recommender with your updated resume or CV if needed.

### Include real stories in the letter

Some universities ask the recommender how an applicant reacts to failures, setbacks, and difficulties. Hence, your recommendation letter needs to show you as a real person, highlight your strong points but also show that you will grow from your experience at the chosen university. The admission committee will see your personality and will decide that you are worthy to be accepted to the university.



## Edit the letter before submitting it

Make sure the recommendation letter for graduate school is easily readable and has the proper structure. Experts who work with admission documents know how to make the recommendation letters appealing to the admission committee. Recommendation letter editing will eliminate all the mistakes that can be detrimental to your application.

## Always Check The Specific Requirements of The Program You Are Applying to

Different programs require different recommendation letters. You should always check the admission section on the website of the school you are applying to. For example, if you are applying to different programs make sure your recommender sends the right recommendation letters. It may be possible that your recommender needs to answer specific questions or to rate your research capability, motivation, leadership skills, and critical thinking, etc on the online application.

In general, it is only 2 recommendation letters needed. But Stanford University allows submitting up to 6 recommendation letters, but no less than 3 recommendation letters. Harvard University accepts letters of recommendation from the colleague and Berkeley states it is inappropriate and can be detrimental for your application. In the MBA application, if the student recommender is not his current supervisor (the reason might be that you are an entrepreneur or you work for the family business) he needs to explain why the letter is coming from another person.

Tip from an EssayEdge expert: it is vital to state the university or business email (for MBA applicants) of your recommender. That will serve more credibility to the document.

## How to Write a Letter of Recommendation for Graduate School: General Structure

It is advised to show in the letter different information that can't be found in the applicant's resume or personal statement. That is why it is essential for the letter to be written by a recommender, for the admissions committee to have the description of the applicant in another person's voice. Even if you write the letter yourself it will definitely be noticeable for the admissions committee as they will know your writing style from your application.

It is a good practice for learning how to write a letter of recommendation for graduate school to study the examples of successful recommendation letters that got the applicant to their school of choice. Generally, a great recommendation letter has to include such a structure:

In the first paragraph, the recommender has to establish how he knows the applicant. Show how you two have been working together academically or professionally, for how long have you known this person, and why you are able to comment on a person's ability to study at the chosen university.

The body of the recommendation letter shows the skills and personality of the person by giving examples and explanations. Brainstorm the situations where an applicant showed his abilities and stood out among others in the class.

In the closing paragraph, the letter writer has to sum up how a person will be fitting in the chosen university. The recommender should explain how and why they feel the applicant will be a great fit for the grad program he is applying to and how he will be a good part of the work.



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