

Strategizing Your Recommendation Letters



Alyssa Hwang
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**Thinking about
recommendation letters
can be scary. Let's break
them down.**

Recommendation letters are a crucial part of applications.

- PhD applications typically ask for 3+ letters.
- Fellowships typically ask for 4 letters.

- Best case scenario: glowing, personal recommendation letters from 3+ famous research professors in your subfield.
- Worst case scenario: 3+ letters from people who secretly hate you.

We are all somewhere in the middle!

**Reminder: letters are just
one component of your
app.**

You can help your writers help you.

- Ask for a letter at least a month before the deadline.
- Send periodic reminders (one month, two weeks, three days, day of).
- Prepare a packet about yourself, the work you've done together, the programs you are applying to, and the deadlines.
 - We will work on this today!

Don't be afraid to ask for multiple letters.

- People know what they can handle and will say no if they can't do it.
- Professors are used to writing plenty of letters for plenty of people.

**Let's plan our
recommendation letters
together.**

1) List everyone you have ever worked with.

- This list can include:
 - Professors
 - Research advisors
 - Employers
 - Club advisors
 - Postdocs and PhD students
 - Internship supervisors
 - TA supervisors
- Don't worry about what or how much you've done.
- Just start writing people's names.

2) List the qualities about yourself you want to emphasize.

- For example:
 - Research expertise
 - Teaching excellence
 - Leadership
 - Compassion
 - Dedication
 - Motivation
 - Past projects
 - Personal background
 - Quick learning
- Bonus: you can include these qualities in your personal statement too.

3) Circle all the people from (1) that can talk about (2).

- No limits: circle as many as you want, but try to aim for at least 3.
- Definitely include anyone who has supervised you for research.

4) Deep dive into each person from (3).

- For each person, list how you met and what you worked on together.
- Be sure to include details relating to (2)--but not every person needs to cover every detail.
- To be even more helpful, include dates!

5) Ask for **strong** recommendation letters!

- If you haven't spoken to your potential writer for a while, you can ask for a 30-min chat to catch up before asking.
- You can also email your potential writer.
 - Be sure to include your CV/resume, any important updates, and deadlines.

“Can you write me a strong recommendation letter?”

Questions?