

The Dos and Don'ts of Requesting College Recommendations

A list of things you should and shouldn't do when asking for a recommendation

Presented by My College Options Some college applications require you to submit recommendations. Because this is such an important part of your application, you should be as organized as possible. To help you with this process, here is a list of things you should and shouldn't do when asking for a recommendation.

DO begin early. Most recommenders need at least two weeks, to write recommendations, maybe longer. Ask them as far in advance of an application deadline as you can to be sure your recommendation gets prepared in a timely manner.

DON'T wait until the last minute to ask for a recommendation. Teachers and administrators are busy people. In addition to their regular work, they are probably getting requests for recommendations from many other students.

DO ask the right person for a recommendation. A recommender should be someone who knows you well and can give an honest and candid opinion of your academic abilities and your personal character. Many schools are specific and require your recommendations to come from a guidance counselor and possibly a teacher of a certain subject. Other people you might consider asking are employers, coaches or activity leaders.

DON'T ask family members or friends for recommendations. While they might know a lot about you, their recommendations might seem biased and won't hold as much weight with admissions counselors.

DO ask personally for a recommendation. This shows how important the recommendation is to you and gives you a chance to answer questions and clarify doubts the recommender might have.

DON'T ask too many people for recommendations. Remember, it's quality, not quantity, that admissions officials are looking for.

DO provide your recommenders with all the information they need. Remind them that their direct connection to you – a class, activity, job, etc. – is what you'd like them to write about. Provide them with any recommendation forms that come from the college to which you are applying. Also, make sure they are clear about any deadlines.

DON'T forget to include stamped, addressed envelopes. It's a good idea to overestimate the cost of postage, just in case the recommender attaches any additional sheets to the letter or recommendation form.

DO check in with your recommender. Don't check in too often, though. You don't want to become a pest.