

Better Letters of Recommendation

A handout for students (from a faculty or staff member writing a recommendation)

This is a relationship, not a transaction. I prefer one month's notice, and two weeks at a minimum. I have made exceptions in extraordinary cases (late decision or late discovery of a very attractive option).

I need a portfolio from you with the following contents:

1. A preliminary list of the graduate programs you are considering, and how you differentiate them. Most faculty recommend you apply to two safe schools, two reach schools, and two schools from the middle of the spectrum, more for law and medicine. If you are going to go to the trouble to apply to graduate school, please have a strategy to success at the process.
2. A printout of your transcripts.
3. Copies of two or three graded work projects, theses/papers/labs/write-ups that represent the quality of your work.
4. A rough draft or outline of your personal statement or statement of purpose. If you want help with this, see Donald Asher's *Graduate Admissions Essays*, available in the Center for Career Services resource library.
5. A CV or resume for me, including student activities, volunteer, and service experiences, etc. If you have a different CV or resume crafted for submission to graduate schools, I'd like to see that version also.
6. A brief list of what you think would be most important for a graduate program to know about you.
7. Clear instructions for submitting the letter. Provide web links and codes in advance, and stamps (correct postage) for anything that is mailed. The less secretarial work I have to do, the more effort I can put into your letter itself.
8. *A very clear indications of when you need the letters submitted.* Otherwise, I will assume that anything ahead of the deadline is satisfactory.

After I submit your recommendations, I need two more things:

1. You need to share with me any communiques from the graduate programs about secondary inquiries, admission offers, waitlist notices, funding/support/fellowship/assistantship offers, telephone contact, meet-and-greet events, and so on. This helps me be a better advisor.
2. I need to know where you decide to go!