

9 Rules For Requesting Letters of Recommendation from Teachers

While you're navigating high school and your classes, you should try to make a good impression and form a good relationship with each of your teachers. Not only will this make it easier to ask for help and navigate your classes throughout high school, but it will also give you a plethora of options to choose from when deciding which teachers are going to write your recommendation letters.

Ideally, the teacher who writes your recommendation has known you for a long time, thinks you are a great student and a great candidate for college, and has some positive experiences with you that her or she can talk about. Once you've identified which teachers fit that profile best, you need to kindly and thoughtfully request a letter of recommendation from them, preferably at the beginning of your senior year or earlier.

When it comes time to request letters of recommendation, you need to make sure you do it right. After all, teachers are busy, they don't get paid for writing your letter of recommendation, and they probably have many other students asking them for letters of recommendation as well. You want to make sure you ask your teacher to write you a recommendation well ahead of time and in a kind and respectful manner so that he or she agrees.

In order to ensure the best possible recommendation letters for your college applications, make sure to follow these nine guidelines for requesting a letter of recommendation. As long as you do the following, your teacher is unlikely to turn you down!

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Rule 1: Plan Ahead

Ideally, you should know which teachers you want to write your recommendation letters well in advance of the start of your college applications. By the end of your junior year, start thinking about which teachers you have had the greatest relationships with throughout your high school career. Try to narrow it down to the 2 or 3 teachers whom you think would be the best to ask.

Some teachers are kind enough to accept recommendation letter requests during the summer before your senior year so that they have ample time to write you a great letter. Those teachers are incredible, so be sure to catch them and ask before summer vacation starts.

For those teachers who are willing to write you a letter but will need to wait until the Fall, make sure to ask them at the beginning of your senior year, or at least ask them a few months before the application deadline. This way, they'll have ample time to put together a good letter for you. Advanced notice is crucial if you want to get a good letter.

Rule 2: Ask Nicely

Remember, writing recommendation letters is not part of a teacher's job. If a teacher agrees to write you a letter, he or she is doing it purely out of the goodness of his/her heart. You should be grateful for this and take this into consideration when asking your teachers.

Thus, asking for a recommendation letter shouldn't just be a two sentence email telling them that they have to write you a letter. If you can, take the time to stop by their classroom, chat with them, catch up, and then ask politely whether they have the time/would be willing to help you get into college by writing

you a letter of recommendation. Show that you are asking them to do this for you because you trust them and they were one of your favorite teachers.

If asking your teacher in person is not an option and you have to request a letter of recommendation by email, make sure that it is written formally and kindly. Be sure to include some updates on your life and other relevant information in the email along with some nice compliments about your teacher's teaching style and some fond memories you have of him/her.

Rule 3: Ask What Kind of Letter You Might Get

The unfortunate truth is that not all recommendation letters are created equal. Some teachers take the time to write extraordinary letters that absolutely shower a student with praise. These are the teachers you want to try to find sooner rather than later.

Other teachers may write a generic letter, a short letter, or they may even just get a template letter off of the internet. Usually, a teacher will be honest about what kind of letter they are going to write if you ask them. If they tell you you won't get a personalized letter from them, it's not that they don't mean well. Rather, some teachers are just busier than others and some have more experience in writing recommendation letters than others.

Keep in mind that when you're asking what kind of letter you might get, you need to make sure you phrase it correctly. Don't ask your teacher whether she or he is going to write you a good letter or a bad letter or whether your teacher spends a lot of time on each letter. Just ask your teacher how they usually format their letters or what kind of information about the student they like to add in their letters. That'll probably give you all the indication you need for what kind of letter this teacher would write for you.

Rule 4: Be Professional

While you're corresponding with the teacher who is writing your recommendation letter, don't be sloppy. Remember that this teacher is evaluating you for a college, and they will probably draw on the most recent experiences they can remember with you. Thus, you need to make sure that the interactions you have while they're writing your letter or when you ask for a letter are professional, kind, and well-mannered.

More specifically, this means that if you're emailing a teacher, make sure it is a professional email with no grammatical mistakes and spelling errors. It should also be formatted correctly, as discussed in our [comprehensive guide to e-mail etiquette for high schoolers](#). If you're talking to the teacher in person, you don't have to be too formal, but you should make sure you are polite, well-dressed, and well-mannered throughout the interaction.

Rule 5: Include Relevant Details

While you're asking for a letter, you should be sure to bring up some memories that you had with him/her to help jog his/her memory and remember you as a student. Bring up a specific experience you had with your teacher that you really enjoyed or something she/he taught you that you haven't forgotten all this time.

You should also give your teacher all the logistical information he or she will need to write this letter, like your GPA, class rank, unofficial transcript, and most importantly, the deadline for when this letter is due. You want the teacher to leave the conversation feeling like they have more than enough information to write you a great letter of recommendation.

How does your GPA, class rank, and more affect your admissions chances? [Find out by using our free chancing calculator.](#)

Rule 6: Follow Up

After you talk with your teacher and he/she agrees to write you a letter of recommendation, don't just leave it there. Be sure to send them an email or some more informal form of communication thanking them again for agreeing to write a recommendation letter and asking if there is any information about you that they need to write a great recommendation.

You can also contact them periodically before the letter is due to make sure they haven't forgotten to write you the letter. You can remind them about the application due date, see if the letter is in progress, and ease some of the anxiety you might be feeling as you wait for the letter to be finished.

Rule 7: Make It Easy

You can't just ask someone to write you a recommendation letter and give them nothing to work with. You have to give them something like your resume or something else that'll give them some background about you, what your skills and abilities are, and what you've been up to for the past four years. A good teacher will incorporate that information into their letter and link it to his/her own experiences with you as a student.

Rule 8: Send a Reminder

Teachers aren't perfect. Even if a teacher agrees to write a letter of recommendation and gives you every assurance that it will happen on time, they may forget as time passes or they may not submit the letter by the deadline. It's up to you to check in with the teachers that you've asked to write your recommendation letters and make sure that they haven't forgotten.

You don't have to check in too often. In fact, repeatedly bugging your teachers about the letter may annoy them. Wait a few weeks at a time before sending a quick email to check on the progress. Don't make it a long email. Just a few sentences is fine so as not to waste your teacher's time. If the deadline gets close and your teacher still hasn't finished the letter, you can start contacting them a bit more frequently. Still, be conscious and respectful of your teachers' responsibilities. After all, your letter is probably not the most important thing on their mind.

Rule 9: Say Thank You

Once your teacher has written your recommendation letter, it is so important that you thank them for taking the extra time and effort to help you with their college applications. A simple email may not be enough in this case. Many students opt to give a little gift like a gift card or something homemade like a card to show their appreciation.

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Short Bio

Sadhvi is a recent graduate from the University of California, Berkeley, where she double majored in Economics and Media Studies. Having applied to over 8 universities, each with different application platforms and requirements, she is eager to share her knowledge now that her application process is over. Other than writing, Sadhvi's interests include dancing, playing the piano, and trying not to burn her apartment down when she cooks!