

I am happy to write letters of recommendation for students who meet the following criteria:

- You must have fully completed at least one class with me. I will not write a letter for a current first-time student, as I will not have an adequate sense of your academic abilities until you complete the term. Indeed, it is ideal to have had two or more classes with me, as I will then be able to comment on your consistency across classes.
- You should have earned a grade of an A (ideal) or B (acceptable) in my classes. A high grade in my class indicates that I think highly of your academic skills, which makes for a stronger letter on my part. If you have earned a grade less than a B, it is better to ask for a letter from another professor in whose class you especially excelled.
- I must have a sense of you as a person beyond the letter grade that appears in my records. Especially for large lecture-style courses, where it is difficult for professors to know their students well individually, reflect back upon your own behavior and ask yourself the following: Did you ask astute questions in class? Did you actively participate in discussions? Did you make use of office hours? Did you find other ways to leave a lasting, positive impression? To write a strong and effective letter, I need to be able to describe you qualitatively.
- I will only write recommendation letters when you have signed a waiver of your right to examine the letter. When I write letters of recommendation, I treat them as confidential documents whose destination is to a relevant third party (e.g., prospective employer, graduate school). By asking me for a letter, you are giving me permission to discuss your performance, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in my courses and to provide the third party with an honest accounting of your academic abilities and your promise for future success.
- I need at least two weeks to craft and submit a letter for you. Faculty schedules are busy, and I need as much lead time as possible. Two weeks is the minimum amount of lead time for me to consider writing for you. As the saying goes: “Failure to plan on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part”.

If I do agree to write a recommendation, you have several responsibilities:

- Organize all the pertinent information together. Information that I need to know per letter includes: nature of your application (a description of the organization/program to which you’re applying), deadline for the letter to be postmarked/received, method by which I am to submit the letter (via email, in hard copy mailed directly to a program, in hard copy to you with a signature across the envelope seal), name and contact information of the third party (full names and affiliations of the person/group receiving the letter), if there is a word limit for the recommendation letter, and any additional forms that I am to complete on your behalf. If there are additional forms beyond the letter, you must first check that you have completed all the relevant student-related sections (e.g., your name, contact information, and waiver of right to letter) before handing the materials over to me. There is no need to furnish me with envelopes and stamps.

- If you are applying to more than one program at a time, it is helpful for you to give me a detailed, organized list of all the sites. If there are unique features about a site that you want me to attend to in my letter (e.g., a job is asking for applicants with a strong statistical background), tell me, as this will help me tailor each letter to your specific needs.
- Don't ask for a recommendation letter unless you're certain you're going to follow through with the rest of your application. First, be sure that you're eligible for the position by reading the fine print. If a summer clinical internship wants applicants who are fluent in Russian and you have never taken any Russian, then you are not eligible and should not be asking me to write a letter for you. Second, do as much homework as possible to make sure that you like the job/position enough to warrant an application. If the job involves you working solo in the wilderness for long periods of time and you hate nature and can't stand being alone, then you probably should not be applying and should not be asking me to write a letter for you. Finding a job in the current economic climate is difficult, and it makes sense to cast a wide net. However, casting wide is different than casting frivolously and impulsively; be mindful that writing support letters takes considerable time and effort by faculty.
- So that I can write a full and effective letter, it is helpful for me to have additional information about you when possible and when relevant such as: an unofficial copy of your transcript, your résumé, a copy of the cover letter that will accompany your job application, copies of writing that you have submitted for publication, copies of scientific posters with which you've been involved, scores from recent entrance exams (GRE, MCAT), and copies of personal statements that you're submitting with your application.
- If your application involves a funding request to an agency to support independent research (Fulbright Scholarship, Bates Summer Research Fellowship), you will want to spend ample time developing your proposal before asking for a faculty endorsement letter. Very ambitious applications like a Fulbright require months of careful and consultative planning. I cannot write a letter in support of your project unless there is a project to support.