

TIPS FROM THE DEAN: **Asking for Recommendation Letters**

Many of you are applying for summer internships and fellowships, and seniors are applying for jobs and graduate school. I've fielded many inquiries recently on how to request recommendation letters, so I hope this will be useful!

1) Cultivating relationships:

Many different people can be good recommenders! Your list doesn't need to be limited to professors. Seminar instructors, teaching fellows, employers, deans, advisers, mentors, etc., may all be in the position to write a strong letter for you. As you reflect on your semester, think about the many relationships you have formed at Yale. If there's someone whose work you admire, or who has been a great mentor, reach out to them! Go to office hours, ask them if you can meet for coffee or lunch, and follow up with an email thanking them for their time.

2) Asking the "right" person:

Think carefully about the position/fellowship/school you are applying to. What kind of qualities will members of the search committee be looking for? Is it a job where you will be crunching numbers all day? Will you be writing and editing? Will you be working in a lab?

Ultimately you want to ask the people who know you best and who will be able to write the strongest and most personalized recommendation on your behalf. That said, asking a person who works in the field to which you are applying, or who can speak to specific skills you'll be using in the position, can be very helpful.

3) How do I ask?

Send a polite email to the professor asking if they are willing to write for you. Try to give the professor as much information as possible, as succinctly as possible. What are you applying for? Why are you a good fit for the position. Also, try to give them as much lead time as possible— a month or more is ideal.

4) If they say yes, ask them what information will be helpful to them. Would they like a copy of your cv? Do they want information about each individual job/position? Would they like a list of submission information -- i.e. will they get a prompt by email? Do they have to send their recommendation via email or hard copy? Do they want a reminder about upcoming deadlines, and how far in advance?

5) If they say no, be gracious. They may feel they don't know you well enough to write a good letter. It happens! That's why it's important to cultivate relationships (see number 1.)

6) No matter what, say thank you! Writing a thoughtful, strong letter takes time and effort. Make sure to follow up once they have submitted the recommendations with an email thanking them, and don't forget to let them know if you got the job or not!

7) If you would like to ask a recommender for a general letter for your file, I encourage you to look at some of the dossier services, such as Vitae and Interfolio, recommended by OCS. You can learn more about them here: <https://ocs.yale.edu/get-prepared/dossier-services>