**How to Ask for Letters of Recommendation**

Do you approach your professors and mentors with trepidation when you have to ask for letters of recommendation? Here are some tips that we gleaned from professors that will provide you with the confidence that comes from knowing that you are handling the situation properly.

First, ask the professor if he or she is comfortable writing the letter for you. One shouldn't automatically presume that the individual knows you well enough or can honestly recommend you for a position. It is rare to be turned down, but asking in this way is polite. If the professor doesn't know you well, you can say, "I was in your Subject 101 lecture and I know it was a large class, but if I give you additional information about myself, would you be willing to recommend me for X?" Use common sense. If you cheated or skipped class, do not put the professor in the position of having to say no. But if you worked hard, showed a good attitude and were personable, ask with confidence.

Second, give the person plenty of time. Professors and supervisors have many of their own deadlines to worry about. Two weeks is generally the absolute minimum amount of time to allow. If you do ask for a last-minute letter, you should express great regret about doing so and should apologize profusely.

Be organized to make the process as easy as possible on these individuals. Give them your academic transcript, a resume or list of your campus activities, your essay if you are required to submit one, and another other information that could be helpful. Try to submit all of your addresses and forms together, if possible. Put them in a folder with any addressed and *stampe*d envelopes. (You should pay for the postage on your own letters of recommendation). If schools use an online referral, the professor will be sent an email. Make sure that your forms are filled out and signed. Write the deadline in a prominent place, such as the cover of the folder.

Should you remind your mentor or professor or boss about the deadline as it nears? Everyone that we questioned said yes. Professors said that sometimes recommendation forms get lost in the avalanche of paper on their desks. A short email saying "Dr. Smith, I know that you are busy, so I just wanted to remind you that the deadline for my recommendation forms is Feb. 1" followed by "Thanks for doing this for me" would not be considered insulting but would in fact be welcomed.

Lastly, remember that anyone who has cared enough to write a letter for you should be thanked and they are interested in the outcome. Send a thank-you note at the very least and use a notecard or stationery. Do not use email. Then let the professor know if you were accepted/interviewed or not.

Professors interviewed for this article said that they are happy to write letters but that they sometimes felt that this service was taken for granted. Some said that they write hundreds of letters a year, not just for current students but for alumni. They said that writing letters is something that takes time away from other activities on which they are evaluated. Many put considerable effort into writing these letters, yet there is usually only the reward of seeing students do well. Furthermore, it seems that some professors are asked to write recommendations far more than others and thus these individuals spend a disproportionate amount of time on the task. Everyone was quick to say, however, that they are in the teaching field because they want to help students succeed.

Ultimately then, ask for letters of referral with confidence, but with consideration and gratitude for the professors’ time and effort on your behalf.