

Prof. Hoffman's Recommendation Policy

(see other Hoffman lab resources at: <https://hoffman.physics.harvard.edu/resources.html>)

(0) For best results, waive your right to read your own letter.

In the United States, letters of recommendation are typically confidential. Reviewers give most weight to letters that provide an honest and detailed assessment. Given the litigious tendency of US society, many recommenders will play it safe and write a bland and generic letter if they know that you may eventually read it. If you don't waive your right to read your letter, the reviewer may also infer that the recommendation is less candid.

Please select one: *

- ☒ I waive my right to review all recommendations and supporting documents submitted by me or on my behalf.
- ☐ I DO NOT waive my right to review all recommendations and supporting documents submitted by me or on my behalf.

(1) Allow at least 2 weeks notice for the first request.

(This can sometimes be waived if there are extenuating circumstances, but I cannot guarantee that my schedule will allow short turnaround at any given time.)

(2) Put the recommendation deadline in the subject line of all emails.

For example: "Feb 1 deadline, recommendation request"

If there are multiple deadlines, put the first one in the subject line.

(3) At least 1 week before deadline, send in a single email:

- CV (please hyperlink your publications or other useful info, as applicable)
 - In case you haven't made your CV before, here is an [example](#).
- Draft of your application essay, or at least 1-2 coherent paragraphs about why you are applying to this program and how it fits into your short and long term goals.
- **Coherent paragraphs that factually describe the key points of your work in my lab.**
 - **Larger context of the problem you worked on.**
 - **Your specific goals within this context.**
 - **Technical details of your accomplishments that you would like me to highlight.**
 - **Please put careful thought into your specific strengths that you would like to come across in the letter, and remind me of a concrete accomplishment that demonstrates each strength. An adjective is useless without an example.**
- Student teaching evaluations (if you have worked as a TF or CA).
- Unofficial transcript (for undergraduates only).
- Information about the programs you are applying to:
 - list of URLs for the programs (if applicable)
 - list of deadlines for the letters
 - information about how to submit the letters (electronic submission strongly preferred)
 - any forms that need to be filled out (fill out all fields you can)
 - information about the competitiveness of the program may also be helpful (e.g. 1 winner out of 1000 applicants, or 50% acceptance rate, etc.)

Please ensure that all attached files have useful names, e.g. YourName-CV.pdf and YourName-transcript.pdf.

(4) Solicit input from TF or research mentor

If you are a student in my class and you have gotten to know your TF well, or if you are a student in my lab and you are working more directly with a grad student or postdoc research mentor: you should ask the TF or research mentor to directly email me a paragraph or two about their impressions of your work. You should give the TF or research mentor a deadline to email their contribution to me by the same time you email me the information above.

(5) Multiple recommendations

If you are applying to multiple programs with multiple deadlines, please get all of your information together in advance of the first deadline, so that all recommendations can be submitted in a single sitting. It can be mind-boggling for me to receive multiple automatic emails requesting recommendations for different programs, spread out over several days or weeks. If possible, please click the web buttons to generate those automatic emails to the recommender all in one sitting, so that the recommender receives all the recommendation requests within a short time frame. Then you can send me a quick email saying "You should have just received 5 automatically generated recommendation requests from Universities A, B, C, D, and E. Please let me know if you didn't receive any of these."

(6) You are responsible for sending reminders - but do not resend all requests!

While I will try to let you know when I have submitted the recommendation, you are ultimately responsible for checking to make sure your application is complete. If the deadline is fast approaching, please send a polite reminder, ideally in the same email thread (with the key deadline in the subject line, and the full list of schools in the body of the email!) so that all relevant attachments & information remain together. Please **do not** resend the automated requests from the schools; they typically do not have deadlines in their subject lines, and they just clutter up my inbox, so I'm likely to miss the one key reminder from you that has the deadline & school list.

(7) Attention to detail

Your care in sending organized emails with useful subject lines and comprehensive information, as well as your ability to write grammatically-correct, coherent paragraphs about your goals and your work, form a part of my impression of your ability to communicate. Clear communication is essential for success in science. I am reluctant or unable to recommend people who do not demonstrate that they are clear thinkers and communicators.

(8) Miscellaneous good advice

These links may help you think about the way you ask for a letter and the info you provide me:

<http://cs.brown.edu/~sk/Memos/Grad-School-Recos/>

<https://ggg.stanford.edu/advice-requesting-letters-recommendation>

Good luck with your application!

Prof. Hoffman's commitment: I will check my letter for gendered or biased language according to best practices exemplified here:

- <https://www.tomforth.co.uk/genderbias/>
- <https://gofar.georgetown.edu/avoiding-bias-in-recommendation-letters/>