Letters of Recommendation: The Basics



Here are some letter of recommendation basics and best practices that can help you get excellent recommendations on schedule:

- **Know all the requirements**
  Carefully follow each college's requirements on who should write your letters of recommendation. Ask someone who taught you recently, knows you well, and will have positive things to say about you. It helps if they teach a core class related to your academic and career aspirations.
- **Ask early**
  Ask for your recommendations as early as possible, before your teachers get overwhelmed with requests. The absolute latest you should ask is three weeks in advance, but aim for much sooner. This allows for the possibility of issues, like a teacher running behind on your letter. Plus, your teacher will appreciate you asking early, and they'll write your letter before "recommendation fatigue" sets in.
- **Ask in person, and give lots of detail**
  Ask your recommenders in person, follow up with an email detailing the schools you're applying to, their deadlines, and what you're planning to major in. Provide information about your extracurricular activities, accomplishments, and any challenges or obstacles you've overcome. This can be done with a formal resume or a bulleted summary.
- **Provide a stamped, addressed envelope (if using snail mail)**
  Typically, your recommenders will submit their letters electronically. If they need to mail the letter, it's up to you to provide a stamped, addressed envelope to each recommender.

If you follow these tips, you're more likely to receive well-written, glowing letters of recommendation on time or even ahead of schedule.