

## TIPS FOR GETTING STRONG LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

The Letters of Recommendation (LOR) that will be provided to your admission's portfolio are an important piece to your academic file as they provide admissions committees with a different perspective of you and a personal opinion of you from a 3<sup>rd</sup> person. These letters may highlight your character in class and/or in your high school community, your study habits, your desire to learn, your ability to be a team player and work with others, and your ability to lead. The goal of these letters is to provide admissions committees with information about you that is not already in your application.

You will most likely need three LOR, one from your guidance/college counselor and two from academic teachers. The counselor letter will focus on your overall character and include highlights from your academic, personal, social and extracurricular life. This letter will give the committee an idea of what you will bring to their college campus and community.

The two letters provided by the teachers should focus on your academic discipline and commitment and how you engage in class. You will be providing your counselor and teachers with information (see below) to help them write personal, strong letters on your behalf. The more information you provide them with, the more compelling their letter will be. Although this is the one aspect of your portfolio that you cannot control, by following these tips, you will set yourself up to receive a strong LOR.

1. Teacher LOR should come from core academic subjects, preferably from junior year. If possible, include one from a teacher in the Humanities subject and one from a STEM course.
  - Read the college application recommendation letter request carefully as certain schools request letters from specific teachers.
  - If you have a special relationship with an elective teacher or coach who can attest to a skill/talent or trait that has not been discussed in your application, have them write a supplemental essay for you (will not count as one of your academic teacher letters).
2. Request LOR from teachers that know you best, not necessarily from teachers that gave you the best grade. Pick teachers that will be excited to write letters for you.
3. Ask for LOR as EARLY AS POSSIBLE. The best time to ask is at the end of junior year so that teachers have the summer to work on your letters. If applying EA or ED, you should try to ask the first week of school at the latest. Keep in mind that some teachers may only write a certain number of letters each year. Ask early before they hit their limit.
4. Ask teachers in person and in private if they have time to write you a recommendation letter. Remember to be gracious in your ask as they are not required to do this. If you do

not have a relationship with this teacher, confirm they are comfortable with writing you a *strong* letter of recommendation. If they say no, be grateful for their honesty and the opportunity to ask a different teacher who can be supportive.

5. For the teacher LOR, create a cover letter which includes:

- Schools you are applying to
- Deadline for LOR for EACH school
- Major (if you are decided)
- Why you asked this teacher (you have a good relationship with him/her, this is your favorite subject, you have done extremely well in this class and want that reflected in the letter)
- Highlights of your accomplishments in their class. For this, you need to provide them with specific examples so answer the following questions to help formulate these highlights:
  - What you learned most/liked most about his/her class (a specific assignment/presentation, group project)?
  - An assignment that challenged you and how you dealt with that (spent extra time on work for this class, received tutoring, did research outside of school)?
  - What you found most interesting about his/her class (a specific unit, an author, his/her analysis on something)?
  - Have you won any awards in this subject area? If so, include those in your cover letter with specifics regarding the award.
- Provide teachers with your resume to give them an idea of what you do outside of the classroom. Remind them that their letter should complement your application (not repeat information already found in it) by addressing your classroom strengths and how you perform as a student with your peers and your teachers.

6. For the counselor LOR, create a cover letter which includes:

- Schools you are applying to
- Deadline for LOR for each school
- Major (if you are decided)

- Insights of you as a person, your character, what you have contributed to your high school in and out of the classroom. For this, you need to provide him/her with answers to the following:
    - Most compelling story of your high school career (specific class you worked hard in and achieved a certain grade, an issue with friends and how it was resolved, a family crisis and how you stepped up, a moment in your athletic career that helped define you).
    - Use 3 words to describe yourself and examples of why you chose them.
    - Point out any issues with lower grades and explain why your grades fell and what you did to resolve this.
    - If you have any special circumstances that should be considered by the admissions committee, provide your counselor with this information so those issues can be addressed.
  - Provide counselor with your resume to give them an idea of what you participate in at your high school but also outside of school. Remind them that their letter should complement your application (not repeat information already found in it). Their LOR should validate the accomplishments on your resume.
7. A 4th LOR can be submitted but ONLY if it provides additional information that has not been included already in the application. This could come from a coach, an employer, a scout master, a community service lead, etc. This extra recommendation is providing additional support with specific examples of how you excel in a different area.
  8. Provide each teacher/counselor with websites, self-addressed envelopes, application links or any other information they may need to submit your LOR.
  9. If the deadline is approaching (one week before due date) and the LOR has not been submitted, communicate with the counselor/teacher and ask them if they need any additional information as the deadline is one week (or # of days) out.
  10. Send teachers/counselor a thank you note once LOR has been submitted.
  11. Once you have decided on and have been accepted to a university, send your teachers/counselors one final note letting them know where you will be going to school and again, thanking them for their support.