Letters of Recommendation

Jobs, internships, scholarships, and school applications may require a resume, a cover letter, and very frequently a letter of recommendation. What is a letter of recommendation? Who do you ask for one? How do you ask for one?

A letter of recommendation is a letter that assesses a person’s ability to perform a specific task by evaluating the characteristics, skills, and experiences of the person being recommended.

Who can you ask? Instructors, academic advisors, customers, and leaders of organizations you volunteer with can all act as personal references.

How do you ask? It is not enough to simply say, “Will you write a letter of recommendation for me?” You need to provide the writer with enough information and material to make composing the letter easy. You are asking a favor of someone—respect their time by providing the following things when requesting a letter of recommendation:

- The description of what the letter is for—job description, scholarship information, school application, etc.
- The type of reference you are seeking--character, professional, academic, employment
- What you are hoping the letter will say about you. Do you want it to reflect your leadership skills, work ethic, professional abilities, or academic success?
- When you will need the letter
- If applicable, who the letter should be addressed to
- Your resume

An example of how to ask for a letter of recommendation:

Dear Mr. Smith

I am applying for a position with The American Red Cross Southwestern PA chapter as a part-time Health and Safety instructor. This position requires excellent presentation skills, which I worked on a great deal in your class last semester. I remember you were very impressed with my final presentation, and I was hoping you could write a letter of recommendation supporting my ability to present ideas clearly and effectively. I believe you also view me as a responsible person—I always arrived to your class on time and turned assignments in by their due dates. This is another quality the American Red Cross values.

If you would be willing to write me a brief letter of recommendation, I would greatly appreciate it. I would like to submit my application for the position by February 10, 2009. I have attached my resume and a link to the job description for your convenience.

Please let me know if you are able to write this letter for me, and if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Sally Jones