



Faculty Letters of Recommendation

Lehman College English Department

As you plan for the future that awaits you beyond the [English Major at Lehman College](http://www.lehman.edu/academics/arts-humanities/english/), you may find that you need one or more faculty members to write a letter on your behalf. The recommendation letter, which tells the story of your talents, hard work, and achievements, is an essential part of any application to graduate schools, fellowships and scholarships, internships, and professional careers. What follows are a few simple steps to help you help us to write you the strongest possible letter.

Choose your professors wisely

Admissions officers and job recruiters are busy people who review hundreds of applications. A good recommendation letter tells them what they need to know quickly and succinctly. How many classes did you take with the professor and how well does s/he know you? How hard did you work in those classes and how well did you do? How does the research, writing, and analytical skills and/or content you acquired in those classes relate to your goals for graduate school, internship, or (pre)professional job?

Use common sense in picking professors to write on your behalf:

- The **more classes** you've taken with a particular professor, the better. Readers put a lot of weight on how well a professor knows you and your work.
- The **better you've done** in the professor's classes, the better his or her letter looks as part of your application. Professors who have given you A's are likely to write glowing things about your work. Professors who have given you B's will have positive things to say. If you received a C or D from a professor, you should probably look elsewhere for a letter.

Give professors adequate time

Applications deadlines for most schools and jobs are hard and fast. Complete all paperwork (including recommendation letters) on time, and admissions officers and recruiters will read your application carefully. Miss the deadline, and your application may never get a reading.

Do everything you can to help your professors meet your application deadlines. Keep in mind that writing an effective recommendation letter takes time and effort, and that professors write many such letters each term. They are happy to write, but it is your job to keep their workload manageable:

- *Know that the standard lead-time for a letter of recommendation is **at least one month** before the application deadline.* If you ask professors to write a letter in less time – let's say two weeks – they may or may not agree to write. If they agree, they will expect you to provide everything they need instantly.
- Provide letter-writers with a **list of the places** to which you're applying, along with each place's **application deadline**. Some letter-writers will also ask you to remind them one week and/or one day before the deadline. Give them whatever they need.

Provide full information

The more your professors know about you, the better the letter they can write:

- Remind professors about any **course(s)** you took with them: the name and number of the course; the semester you took the course; the title and content of your best/final work in the course; what kind of extra effort you put into your work that semester.
- Many professors ask for some form of informal **personal statement**. One might ask you to write a couple of paragraphs explaining what you want to do (in the school or job to which you are applying), why you want to do it, and why they should take you. Another might ask you to write an outline of the key information you want included in the recommendation letter. Writing personal statements for professors will help you complete your application and prepare for interviews.

- Send your professors your most recent unofficial **Lehman College transcript**.
- Give your professors an updated **resume**, so they can see what you do beside coursework, whether at Lehman, in a job or internship or fellowship, and/or as a volunteer. Follow standard resume procedure, putting the most recent items first within a given category, indicating your official position for each item (e.g., “member,” “director”), and providing a line or two of detail about your actions/duties (e.g., “tutored,” “managed,” “researched”).

Fill out the “Recommendation” box properly

Fill out your application carefully, making sure your information is 100% correct and that no boxes are left unfilled. Complete the “Recommendations” section as follows:

- As your professors to send you an email with their **professional signature**, which will list full name, title, department, mailing address, and email. You must identify your recommenders accurately in order for them to receive and respond to electronic requests for letters from schools and employers.
- **Waive your right to read your professors’ recommendation letters.** It’s natural to be curious or anxious about what your professor writes about your work, skills, and potential. But professors agree to write letters only for students they honestly endorse: if a professor agrees to write for you, trust that his or her letter will be supportive. The fact is, admissions officers and recruiters believe what professors write only if you waive your rights to see the letter, since then they are then confident the professor wrote objectively and without undue influence or pressure.

Keep professors in the loop

Professors teach you, read your work, write letters for you, want you to succeed. They are happy to help and puzzled when students do not use their good services. So use them:

- Show **application essay(s)** to one or more friendly professors. These essays are their own genres, professors are very familiar with them, and professors will help you adjust your writing to meet the conventions of a successful application essay. Professors will almost always recommend multiple drafts and careful proofreading, so be prepared!
- If you’re offered an **interview**, let your professors know so they can provide a mock interview if/as desired. Let professors know as you do (and/or do not) get the positions to which you have applied. They will want to **share your news** and support whatever next steps you take.

A few words to the wise

Putting together a strong application is a lot of work, but a successful outcome more than rewards the effort. Some tips:

- Apply to five or six different schools or positions, making sure your list includes a range of choices (from “likely” to “dream”). It is as much work to apply to a six places as one or two, and though multiple applications cost more money, they provide you with an important safety net. Neither you nor your professors can be sure how schools and employers will be making their choices this year, so provide yourself with back-up options.
- If a school or training program/position has what you want, apply for it regardless of how much it costs to enroll. Many programs, particularly those in the humanities, provide generous funding.
- Use Lehman’s resources to apply to fellowships and scholarships that fund graduate or pre-career education:
 - The Lehman [Career Services Center](http://www.lehman.edu/career-services/services.php) is a valuable resource for personal statements and resume: <http://www.lehman.edu/career-services/services.php> . CSC offers workshops on resume-writing, cover-letters, and much more, including links between particular majors and careers.
 - Students in departmental honors programs should contact [Professor Augustine](#) at the Beyond the Bachelors Program. BtheB guides ambitious students through the application process for fellowships and scholarships, in part through short-term non-credit courses about writing for careers.
 - Continuing Education provides a [GRE prep course](#) each term, so take it. And don’t let the GRE intimidate you: many schools require it, but controversies over its value mean that other aspects of your application are likely to be taken far more seriously.