

## **Checklist for students requesting a recommendation letter**

Writing letters is a nice way to me to reconnect with past students and help them achieve their career goals, but it is a time-consuming process and it can also become a nightmare. So, here is a set of general guidelines if you would like me to write a recommendation letter for you.

I'm usually happy to write letters of recommendation for students who have done well in my class. In other words, don't hesitate to ask me if you got an A+, an A, or an A-. Please respect my decision if I say no: I will only write for students whose academic potential I can endorse strongly, and believe me, you don't want a lukewarm letter, it would spoil all your chances of getting what you are applying for.

Please ask me at least two months before the letter is due and also give me a due date for the first recommendation letter.

Please give me a copy of the following items, as separate documents attached to a single e-mail, at least a month before your first letter is due. Feel free to talk to me if you have questions or are unsure about any part of it.

- Your CV (or resume). Highlight information on research or professional experiences, extracurricular activities, or anything else that you think would be relevant for me to mention in your letter.
- Your personal statement.
- Your GRE, MCAT, TOEFL, or other required professional test scores, if applicable.
- A copy of your transcripts (unofficial is fine), with the courses you took with me highlighted. Be sure to write the semester and year of the class if that's not apparent from the transcript.
- Information about yourself. Why are you applying for this program or award or honor or opportunity? What are your future goals? Why do you think you qualify for the program / honor? Which strengths / past activities / accomplishments would you like me to highlight? Is there anything specific on which you would like me to comment (for example: level of English proficiency for international students, a particular personal quality, the leadership you demonstrated on a group project you did with me, etc)? It will help if you bluntly point out your strength (don't be modest!), and the more you can tell the more likely I'll be able to write a good recommendation letter.
- a list of all the schools to which you want a letter sent, including application deadlines. Organize the list chronologically, by the date on which the letter is due. Please be sure to list the precise degree you are seeking, and give the exact name of the department (e.g., seeking a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Department of Political Science at NYU; seeking a Master in International Affairs from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, etc).

If you plan to use your university's dossier service (meaning I need to write only generic letter, which will be saved in a special database and can be sent to several universities or companies upon request), please tell me exactly how to submit the letter to your university's dossier service.

It would also be a good idea to check with me beforehand if I could write tailored letters to the universities / companies I am familiar with.

If your university does not have a dossier service, or if you need me to write tailored letters, please give me a hard copy & an electronic copy of the following items, collected in a folder, at least a month before your first letter is due. Feel free to talk to me if you have questions or are unsure about any part of it. For each school for which I will write a separate letter, give me:

- any checklist or waiver letter that the school requires, along with recommendation forms for the schools that provide them. Complete all information on the form – not only your name and personal info but also my name, rank, address, etc (neatly), as follow:

Full Name : Séverine Autesserre  
Rank : Assistant Professor  
Address : Department of Political Science  
Barnard College, Columbia University  
3009 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027-6598  
Phone : 212-854-4877  
Fax : 212-854-3024  
Webpage : <http://www.columbia.edu/~sa435>

Please waive your right to inspect your files and your letters. If you don't waive this right, graduate schools may not take the letter seriously, because it may look like you have something to hide. Talk to me if you don't feel comfortable doing that, but as a general rule if you can't trust what I have to say about you, then I may not be the right person to be writing the letter for you.

- All the details about where the letter needs to go. Tell me if there's a particular person to whom the letter should be addressed. If I have to submit the letter electronically, give me the email address or URL —double-check that these are correct. If it is to go out in the post, please include a stamped, pre-addressed envelope (put my return address on the front). If a given school wants me to give the letter to you so that you can include it with the rest of your materials, make sure to write that schools' name on the envelope (otherwise you might end up with several envelopes and not know which school gets which envelope) and, if relevant, be sure to give me an envelope with your address on it so that I can send you the letters.

Put all documents (forms and stamped envelopes) for the same program together, and organize them by due date, the earliest deadline on the top of the pile.

Please send me an email a couple of days before the recommendation is due, just to be on the safe side.

Finally, please let me know how it turns out! I mean it: please don't forget to tell me when you get the results, whether they are positive or negative.

Good luck with your applications!