

Guidelines for recommendation letters for graduate school

This page is designed to give general guidelines to students who are seeking a letter of recommendation for graduate school from a faculty member in the Psychology Department. You should always speak to the faculty member directly, ideally at least two months before the letter is due, to find out what specific information they want from you, and in what format. However, the information below can serve as a general "checklist" of things that you should be willing to provide for your letter writers.

Faculty members are generally happy to write letters of recommendation for students who have done well in our classes or who have been reliable contributors to our labs. Writing recommendation letters is a time-consuming process, but it is an important service for students, and it is one that our faculty take very seriously.

The hardest part of writing a letter is writing the first draft; subsequent letters are generally just a matter of replacing the name of one school with another. Before a faculty member can write a good letter for you, you need to provide them with as much information as possible, so that their letter can be informed and specific. You should provide a copy of the information requested below at least a month before your letter is "due." You shouldn't ask a faculty member to put the work into writing a letter before you have done the work of putting together the information and writing your personal statement.

General guidelines

- 1.** You generally should only ask a professor to write you a letter if you have made an A or a B in their class, have worked in their lab, and/or have talked with them on several occasions about your post-college plans. In some cases a professor might be able to write a good letter for a student who has gotten less than a B in their class, but generally this level of performance wouldn't allow them to make a strong endorsement of your academic potential.
- 2.** Many professors will recommend is that you waive your right to inspect your files and your letters, and some won't write a letter for you unless you do so. The reason for this is that 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." If you can't trust what a professor has to say about you, then they may not be the right person to be writing the letter for you.
- 3.** Put all of this information together at least a month before the first deadline. Feel free to talk to the professor if you have questions or are unsure about any part of it, but the earlier you get started on this, the better. Contact the UGA Career Services office or the Psychology Undergraduate Advising Office (room 219) for information if you are unsure of how to create a vita or resume, how to write a personal statement, etc.
- 4.** Writing the personal statement is the most difficult part of the process of applying for graduate school. There are many websites and books available with advice and guidelines on how to get started -- look through the resources in the Psychology Undergraduate Advising Office (room 219) for help. One bit of advice: be sure to talk about your specific experiences that are relevant for that program, why you are

applying to that specific program, and what your goals are to do with your degree. You need to do your homework on the programs to which you are applying. It needs to sound like a professional statement of background and goals, and not like a "diary entry." Most graduate school admissions committees are looking for specific information and clear goals, not creativity, in the essay.

5. If you are using a professor as a reference for a job or are applying to programs that do not require a personal statement, you still need to write out a description of your career goals, what type of job you hope to get, etc.

Information needed (at least a month before the first deadline):

_____ Your vita (or resume). Be sure to include information on research experiences, extracurricular activities, or anything else that you think would be relevant for the professor to mention in your letter.

_____ Your personal statement (the essay in which you outline your goals and reasons for applying to graduate school)

_____ a copy of your transcripts (unofficial, a photocopy of your transcript or something printed off OASIS, is fine), with the courses you took with the professor highlighted. Be sure to write the semester and year of the class if that's not apparent from the transcript.

_____ your GRE (or other required professional test) scores, if applicable.

_____ a LIST: all the schools to which the professor will send a letter, 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 Developmental Psychology from the Department of Psychology; seeking a M.Ed. in Counseling from the Department of Educational Psychology).

_____ addressed and stamped envelopes for all letters (put the professor's return address on the front). Be sure to type these or write them neatly.

_____ recommendation forms for the schools that provide them. Fill in the professor's name and all of their contact information on the forms (neatly).

Complete all information on the form, including the professor's name, rank, address, etc. This information can be found on their personal web page elsewhere in this website. For **example:**

Dr. Katherine Kipp

Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602-3013

Phone: 706-542-2174 (this is the department phone number)

Email: kipp@uga.edu

Contact the specific professor if you have any questions about this.