

Letters of Recommendation

Recommendation letters are extraordinarily important during the academic job search process. You should start thinking about who your letter writers will be well in advance of application deadlines.

SELECTING REFERENCES

Detailed & Positive:

- Letter writers should be able to speak deeply and passionately about your strengths, qualities, and experiences.
 - The individuals you ask to write letters should have first-hand knowledge of your skills – they've seen you teach, co-authored articles with you, worked closely with you on committees, etc.
- You should be confident that the individuals you ask to write letters can write positive letters on your behalf. If you're unsure, ask them directly.

Topical Areas:

- Universities usually request three letters but sometimes request as many as five.
- One of your letters, generally from your dissertation chair, should address your potential as a researcher.
- Your second letter should discuss your teaching strengths.
- Your third letter should discuss the other skills highlighted in the job description and your cover letter.
 - For example, if you emphasized your leadership in professional organizations, perhaps your third letter should be written by somebody with whom you have served on committees.
- As an alternative, if you wish to emphasize your solid background as a researcher or teacher, perhaps your third letter could focus on one of those topics to supplement your other letter on the chosen topic.
- If you have two letters addressing the same basic topic, one should be written by somebody outside of your academic department if you want the letters to have maximum impact.

HELPING YOUR REFERENCES

Start Early:

- Writing recommendation letters is an important job that most faculty members take seriously because they want their students to become successful professionals, so do not be shy about asking for letters.
- On the other hand, writing thoughtful effective letters takes significant time and energy so it is imperative that you provide your references with sufficient time.
- It is best to ask for letters early in your job search, perhaps even before you've seen interesting job postings.
- At the very least, give your references 2-4 weeks to write, edit, and send each letter.

Provide Documentation:

- You should provide your letter writers with adequate information about your background and the job description so they are able to write vivid, thorough, exceptional letters.
- Try to schedule a meeting with each of your letter writers.
- Provide each of your references with important documents such as a copy of the job description (with the department's website and contact information), your targeted CV, targeted cover letter, research statement, writing samples, teaching statement, teaching portfolio, transcript, etc.
- Highlight awards, publications, and experiences you want your references to address in their letters.

Talk Logistics:

- Let your recommenders know that academic reference letters are usually 1-2 pages in length.
- Indicate the application deadlines.
- Tell your letter writers when you intend to mail your application packet and inform them to send their letters when they have them ready (even if it is before you send the rest of your application).

LETTERS OF EVALUATION ONLINE (LEO)

Description:

- The Career Center has an online letter of recommendation service for students applying to academic positions.
- The system, which is called Letters of Evaluation (or LEO for short), works as follows:
 - You establish a LEO file online.
 - You provide your references with the information discussed earlier in the handout.
 - They write your letters and send them to us.
 - We send the letters to the addresses you provide to us.
 - We keep your letters for 20 years.
- The fee to establish a file is \$40.00 and the charge per mailing address is \$10.

Advantages & Disadvantages:

- This service is most helpful if:
 - You want your references to write just 1 letter, which may be updated at any time.
 - The job description asks for 'confidential' letters.
 - You think you will have a hard time keeping track of your letters.
 - You want the ability to verify letters contained in your file, confirm file mailings, and make requests from any computer 24 hours a day.
- The major drawback:
 - Your reference letters will not be tailored to each individual school.

Additional Information:

- Visit - <http://careers.washington.edu/leo>
- Read - <http://explore.careers.washington.edu/leo/faqmainpage.asp>
- Call - (206) 543-9104
- Email - ccsfiles@u.washington.edu

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- University of California at Berkeley - <http://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDAcademic.stm>
- Stanford University - <http://cardinalcareers.stanford.edu/communities/graduate/guides.html>
- The Chronicle of Higher Education - <http://chronicle.com>
- Vick, J. M., & Furlong, J. S. (2008). *The academic job search handbook (4th ed)*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Formo, D. M., & Reed, C. (1999). *Job search in academe: Strategic rhetorics for faculty job candidates*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

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