

College Applications

Letters of Recommendation

Colleges usually request one or two letters of recommendation from current teachers. In general, one should be from a Humanities or language teacher, one from a science or math teacher. The exceptions would be if you're applying to a specialty school or department (music, art, engineering, athletics, etc.).

If none of your current teachers knows you well, you may ask someone who taught you last year. Don't go further back than that.

When you ask teachers for letters of recommendation, consider the following:

1. Ask someone who knows you well and who can communicate that knowledge.
2. Ask well ahead of time, and ask whether the teacher feels (s)he can be positive.
3. If the teacher is going to send the recommendation by "snail mail" rather than online, provide a stamped addressed envelope for each college as well as the correct form, filled out fully. On the form, waive your rights; date and sign the waiver. Attach a sticky note with the deadline(s). You only need to provide one Common Application form—the teacher will make copies for each college.
4. About a week before the deadline, ask (politely) if the letter has been completed. "Mr. Scrooge, I want to thank you for writing my letter to Skidless U. I'm just checking today to see if my file is complete. Have you had a chance to get to the letter?"
5. If you decide not to apply to a school, please tell the teacher. Keep him/her informed of your progress as well—they now have a vested interest in your application (i.e. acceptance, denial, deferral, wait list, and your final decision when you make it).
6. Give appropriate thanks. Your teachers usually spend hours writing these letters on your behalf, and a word of thanks (a real note) or other token of appreciation.

N.B. Colleges almost always want a Counselor Report as well—this is NOT your tutor—it's Peter Smick, who writes for each senior.

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