

Letters of Recommendation



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
School of Law

Office of
Career Services



What is a letter of recommendation? And do I need it?

A reference letter, or a letter of recommendation, is usually written to attest to a person’s skills, character, experience, and/or achievements.

You will need letters of recommendation to accompany some applications for internships, externships, judicial clerkships, and ultimately legal jobs.



Who can I ask to write a letter of recommendation?

Potential employers are interested in hearing about your legal analytical ability, practical experience, academic success, and research and writing skills.



Law Professors Legal Employers

Your references should consist of a hybrid of former employers and academicians so that the potential employer receives information regarding your overall qualifications.



Law Professors

During law school, cultivate relationships with professors so they can get to know you in order to be in a position to comment specifically on your qualifications for a job and be comfortable accepting your request.



Legal Employers

Former or current legal employers with whom you have a positive relationship are also good candidates for recommendation letters. If your current employer does not know you are applying for other jobs, it may be best not to ask for a letter.

Letters of recommendation contain evidence or confirmation of some or all of the following:

Law Professors	Legal Employers
Grades in a particular class	Previous positions held in the organization
Attendance and participation in class	Summary of job responsibilities
Strengths, skills, talents, initiative, dedication, integrity, experience, reliability, etc.	
Ability to work with a team and/or independently	



ProTip!
The person making the recommendation needs to be familiar with your skills, capabilities, experience, and past performance, and be able to refer to specific examples whenever possible.



How do I ask someone to write a letter of recommendation?

First, make a list of professors and/or supervisors who will be your best advocates. Then, set up an appointment, preferably in person, to discuss your request, especially if it is the first time you have asked that particular person to write a letter of recommendation for you.

Requesting letters of recommendation via e-mail is permissible in certain circumstances, for example, if your recommender has recently written other letters for you or is a good distance away. In your e-mail, however, you should offer to meet with the recommender to discuss your application just in case he or she would prefer an in person (or telephonic) meeting.



When should I ask someone to write a letter of recommendation?

Timing is important. A good rule of thumb is to make your request as far in advance as possible.

When you ask for a letter of recommendation, keep in mind that attorneys, employers, professors and references in general are quite busy and their time is limited.



When requesting a letter of recommendation, you should:

1. Articulate your reasons for the recommendation.
2. Discuss the job you are applying for, why you are interested in it, and how your specific qualifications and experiences make you a good candidate.
3. Provide your resume so that the recommender can review your experiences and comment specifically on your qualifications.
4. Be prepared to provide a writing sample and/or transcript, in case the recommender wants to review your writing skills.
5. Let recommenders know whether they should send their letters directly to your prospective employer or to you to include as part of a complete application package.
6. If there is no stated deadline, let the person know when you plan to submit your completed application and ask if he or she can submit the letter at about the same time.
7. Offer to provide stamped envelopes or email addresses in which to send the letters as a courtesy to the recommenders.



ProTip!
While people are generally happy to provide recommendation letters, they may not remember all the specific details about you that will enable them to write a strong letter. This is yet another reason for an initial face-to-face meeting which gives you a chance to remind them.



ProTip!
If the recommenders prefer to keep their letters confidential, but you have been asked to submit your application as a complete package, ask them to send the letters to you in sealed envelopes to ensure confidentiality.



What if they say no?

Remember that letters of recommendation are written on a voluntary basis. A faculty member or employer may decline to write one for you. If you sense reluctance or the answer is no, ask someone else. You want letters only from people who enthusiastically support your application.



What can I do to make it easier for the recommender?

1. Provide some of the basic information. For example:

The name, title, email address, and address of where the letter needs to go, the deadline involved, the position you are applying for, any criteria sought for the position, and all other relevant information.

2. Suggest what you would like them to say—within reason. For example:

“It would be helpful if you could discuss how well I did in your class.”

3. Provide a sample. Sometimes employers or professors ask to see sample recommendation letters to help them draft their own, or alternatively, ask you to write the first draft due to time constraints.



Should I send the recommender a Thank You

Note?

YES. Always send a thank you note expressing your appreciation to the people who wrote recommendation letters for you. It is also appropriate to let them know the status of your job search in the note. If you accepted the position, you should follow up with this information. Your recommenders will appreciate knowing that their efforts were instrumental in your career advancement.

ProTip!

While an e-mail is acceptable, many people, especially those who did not grow up with e-mail, really appreciate a handwritten thank you note.

Sample Letter of Recommendation—Do Not Copy!

Heading: The following is a basic outline of the structure of a reference letter: Use a business letter format with the recipient’s name and address, if known, and address them as “Dear [name].” If the recipient is unknown, then use “Dear Sir/Madam.”

First Paragraph: The first paragraph can contain a brief introduction of the recommender, explaining his or her position and relationship to you (the candidate).

Second Paragraph: The second paragraph may confirm any facts which are known about the candidate such as your job title and role within the company, the dates of employment or the dates during which the recommender was your professor.

Third Paragraph: In the third paragraph, the recommender should aptly describe your skills and qualities. For instance, he or she may state that you were highly dedicated and committed to the job; that you possess an excellent work ethic, drive and enthusiasm; that you pay particular attention to detail or have a keen ability to lead; that you were highly valued and the recommender would gladly re-employ you; and that your contributions to your law school class were invaluable (if a professor). This is where the recommender can single out any exceptional qualities you possess which would be impressive to the potential employer.

Fourth Paragraph: Where possible, the fourth paragraph can give a couple of concrete examples of times when you excelled in your job or in class.

Closing Paragraph: Close the letter on a positive note, and if the recommender is willing to receive further correspondence about your application, be sure they make this clear. Include the recommender’s contact details too. As with any business letter, end the letter appropriately: “Sincerely.”

DON'T FORGET TO PROOFREAD

Be sure to proofread your recommendation letters after you’ve written them. If you are unsure of how to spell a name, you can often check the law firm’s website, its listing on Martindale Hubbell, the NALP directory, or the State Bar of Texas.

SAMPLE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION – DO NOT COPY. USE AS A GUIDE ONLY.

Mary Sue Smith
Managing Partner
Smith Jones White, LLP
1234 Main Street
Dallas, TX 75090

December 1, 2023

Ms. Alicia Florrick
Recruiting Coordinator
United States Department of Justice
1234 J Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20000

Dear Ms. Florrick:

Mr. Alan Applicant has worked directly under my supervision for the past six months. During that time, Alan has been a **self-starter** and a **productive contributor to team efforts**. In addition to having a high degree of **integrity** and a **cheerful personality**, he is one of those rare individuals who can both **follow instructions** and **take initiative**, as appropriate. He is strong in time management and his competence extends beyond the skills for which he was originally hired.

For example, when asked to participate and assist in a special discovery project for a particular client, Alan was ready for the task. In fact, Alan was ultimately **instrumental** in successfully completing the project in a **timely** and **efficient** manner.

I will indeed be sorry to lose Alan as a law clerk when he moves to Washington, DC for the summer. Seldom have I been able to make such an enthusiastic recommendation regarding an employee. I have no hesitation in advising you to hire Alan for this internship.

Sincerely,

Mary Sue Smith

Samuel Stein
Texas A&M University School of Law
1515 Commerce Street
Fort Worth, Texas 76001
(232) 456-789
sstein@law.tamu.edu
December 1, 2023

Dear Sir or Madam:

It gives me great satisfaction to recommend Kyle Field for the Northern Fellowship in Human Rights. I was Kyle's professor in two law school courses and also worked closely with him when he was my Research Assistant last summer. It came as a wonderful surprise when Kyle announced his intention to apply for the Northern Fellowship in Human Rights. Knowing him as I do, I am certain that Kyle will exhibit the same **enthusiasm** during this fellowship as he did during his law school studies.

As a student, Kyle was an **active** and **conscientious** member of the class. He challenged the rest of his classmates to consider issues from new perspectives and often asked **relevant questions**. He always proved to be a **take-charge person** who was able to successfully **develop plans** and **implement them**. Kyle was a **dedicated** student and his grades were **exemplary**.

As my Research Assistant, Kyle analyzed complex issues and drafted memoranda for my subsequent use in a future publication dealing with The Americans with Disabilities Act. His assignments were **well-written, well-supported, organized, neat and timely**. It was evident that Kyle desired to learn more.

Kyle also had interests outside of academics. He has been an active member of the Student Organization for Human Rights (S.O.H.R.) at the Texas A&M University School of Law, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to the advancement of international human rights law and advocacy. This was an on-campus organization that provided opportunities for students to explore and engage in human rights work. Kyle was involved in Miami Habitat for Humanity and formed part of a **dedicated group** of students who committed weekends to bringing affordable housing to people in the greater Miami area. With regard to his personal characteristics, Kyle is extremely **charismatic, focused, determined, outgoing and friendly**. I feel very confident that he will be extremely successful in all his future endeavors. I highly recommend him for the Northern Fellowship in Human Rights.

Sincerely,

Professor Samuel Stein