

RECOMMENDATION ETIQUETTE

Brian DeMaris | www.briandemaris.com

Below are some basic guidelines for a singer (or anyone) to follow when going about gathering references and recommendation letters for colleges, training programs or professional opportunities.

1. Ask first. Don't assume the answer will be yes, and don't be offended if it's not. There are many reasons someone may decline serving as a reference, not the least of which is that they may not have time; so don't take it personally if they decline, or even if they don't respond.
2. Find out what the recommender actually thinks of you. You'd be surprised how many reference letters turn out to be non-recommendations when the individual actually sits down to write. Asking for a recommendation is a great time to get feedback and to find out what someone might say about you to their most respected peers.
3. In general, a strong recommendation from an unknown entity far outweighs a weak or even lukewarm recommendation from a person of clout. Don't be tempted to get a reference from someone who you think the auditors will know if you're not sure that recommender can write about you thoroughly and positively. As your career advances, your relationships with those individuals with a "name" will strengthen. But even for advanced professionals, a letter from anyone whose worked with you closely goes pretty far, even if the readers don't know that person.
4. Make sure your recommender has a complete picture of you. If it's been a couple months since you worked with the individual, offer a sample of your recent work. Provide a resume. Use the opportunity to let the recommender get to know you even better.
5. Discuss your opportunities with each of your references and make sure they actually endorse all the things to which you're applying. Don't assume that just because someone's willing to be your reference that they'll recommend you for anything.
6. Find out how the recommender wishes to be addressed on the portions of any form you need to fill out, and what contact information they'd like to have listed. Also, make sure you spell their name correctly!
7. Some recommenders write separately addressed letters for each institution, while others write one broad recommendation. It doesn't hurt to ask what your recommender prefers. Provide names of addressees, addresses, stamps (if physical letters need to be mailed), and ask if they want you to provide them with envelopes (some will prefer to use their own letterhead and envelopes).

8. Deadlines: know what they are, and plan ahead. Don't ask someone to write you a recommendation at the last minute unless it's an extenuating circumstance which you feel the recommender would understand. Many recommenders wait until the last minute to write recommendations, and many are often late. I recommend sending the recommender no more than two friendly reminders about deadlines. If you're really concerned, ask the office to which you are applying if they can send a reminder to your recommender. The benefit of many electronic recommendation systems is that they do this automatically until the recommender has completed the recommendation.

9. It's wise to seek at least one more recommendation than you actually need. That way, you have a back-up in place in case one of your recommenders falls through. You have something to use instead of feeling uncomfortable about hassling your references about deadlines.

10. Finally, send a thank you note! Often you are one of many individuals for whom your reference is writing a letter. Don't be the only one who doesn't show some appreciation. A handwritten thank you note goes a long way