



Getting Strong Recommendation Letters for College

A breakdown of who to ask, when to ask, how to ask and what to include.

Overview

Asking for a letter of recommendation is an important (and often overlooked) part of the college application process. A well-written letter can highlight your strengths, reinforce your academic goals, and provide admissions officers with insight into who you are beyond your GPA.

This guide will help you...

- ✓ Choose the right teacher based on your goals and major
- ✓ Ask in person and follow up with a strong email
- ✓ Avoid common mistakes that hurt your chances
- ✓ Share a brag sheet that makes your recommender's job easier
- ✓ Send polite reminders and thoughtful thank-you notes
- ✓ Stay organized from first ask to final submission

Let's start by understanding what a recommendation letter actually does, and why it matters.

What Is a Letter of Recommendation?

A letter of recommendation (often called an LOR) is a written statement from a teacher, counselor, or mentor that describes who you are beyond your grades and test scores. It's one of the few parts of your application where someone else speaks directly about your strengths.

How Many Letters Do You Need?

Many colleges, especially selective or private ones, require one or more letters of recommendation as part of your application. Most colleges ask for:

- One to two letters from your teachers
- One letter from your school counselor (often submitted by your counselor automatically)

How to Find Out What Each College Requires

Recommendation requirements vary by school. To find out what's expected for your college list:

- Check each college's admissions website
- Use Loper to quickly see how many letters are required and from whom for every school on your list

Next let's find out why they matter, who to ask, and when to ask...



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Why It Matters

Your transcript shows what you've done. A recommendation letter shows how you did it, and what kind of student, classmate, or person you were along the way.

A strong letter can:

- Reinforce your academic strengths or curiosity
- Highlight your growth, work ethic, or character through specific examples
- Support your interest in a major or academic field
- Add helpful context if you've faced challenges or changes in your high school experience

Who and When to Ask

Now that you understand the role a recommendation plays, the next step is knowing when and who to ask.

Who to Ask

- Choose a junior year teacher from a core academic subject like English, Math, Science, or History
- Prioritize someone who:
 - Has seen your growth over time
 - Can speak to your work ethic and character
 - Has taught you in a subject related to your intended major. For example:
 - STEM majors → Ask a Math or Science teacher
 - Humanities majors → Ask an English or History teacher
 - Art or Design → Ask someone who has seen your creative work



Tip: You don't need to choose the class where you earned the highest grade. Choose someone who can speak to your effort, attitude, and development.

When to Ask

- Ideally at the end of junior year or, if you need to, during the first month of senior year
- Teachers receive many requests in the fall, so asking early gives you a better chance at a thoughtful letter. Always ask in person first, if possible. If that's not possible, send a thoughtful email (see our template at the end of this guide for a starting point)

Next let's talk about *how to ask for a letter (and actually get a good one)*...



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Best Practices for Getting a Strong Letter

After choosing your recommenders, follow these best practices to get the best possible letter:

Ask in Person First

Whenever possible, have a face-to-face conversation or short Zoom call. It shows maturity and respect, and it gives the teacher a chance to ask questions. For example:

“Hi [Teacher’s Name], do you have a minute? I wanted to ask if you’d be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for college. I’ve really enjoyed your class and I think you know me very well as a student, so I’d really appreciate your input.”

Be Specific and Personal

When you ask, share why you chose them. This shows thoughtfulness and helps them understand what you hope their letter will communicate. Example:

“Your class really challenged me, and I feel like I grew a lot while working with you. I think you’ve seen me push myself, and that’s something I hope colleges understand about me.”

Share Supporting Materials

Make your teacher’s job easier by sending helpful materials after they say yes. This helps them tailor the letter to support your overall application. Include:

- A brag sheet (see the template at the end of this guide)
- A list of your college deadlines
- Your intended major or career interests

Send a Follow Up Note (If Needed) & Thank You

If you haven’t received confirmation that the letter was submitted:

- Follow up 2 to 3 weeks before your first deadline & offer to resend anything they might need
- Keep it short and respectful, acknowledging their busy schedule

Once the letter is submitted, send a thank-you email or handwritten note. This small gesture makes a big impression and shows genuine appreciation.

Next let’s summarize what we learned and review some helpful templates...



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Recap & Final Words

Asking for a letter of recommendation can feel awkward, but it's a normal, expected part of the college application process. Teachers write these letters every year. Your job is to make it easy for them to say yes and give them what they need to write something strong and specific.

Here's a quick recap of what you've learned:

- **Choose the right teacher.** Pick someone from a core academic subject who has seen your growth, understands your work ethic, or teaches a subject related to your intended major.
- **Start early.** The best time to ask is at the end of junior year or early in senior fall. Teachers get busy fast.
- **Ask in person if possible.** A short, respectful conversation goes a long way. If you can't ask in person, use the email template at the end of this guide to request your LOR via email.
- **Be prepared.** After a teacher agrees, follow up with a brag sheet, your college list, deadlines, and your intended major or area of interest.
- **Follow up politely.** If you haven't seen confirmation the letter was submitted, send a respectful reminder two to three weeks before your earliest deadline.
- **Say thank you.** Always send a thank-you note after the letter is submitted. A short, genuine message makes a big impression.

Strong recommendation letters don't just happen. They come from thoughtful planning, respectful communication, and preparation.

The next section gives you ready-to-use templates for every step of the process, including:

- **Brag Sheet:** A fill-in-the-blank sheet you can share to help teachers write stronger letters.
- **Initial Email Request:** For if you can't ask in person. Includes space to personalize.
- **Follow-Up Email:** A short check-in to send if you haven't heard if they submitted.
- **Thank You Note:** A polite and sincere way to show appreciation once your letter is in.

Use these as they are, or tweak them to sound more like you!



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Brag Sheet Template

Print this out and handwrite or get the Google Docs template [here](#). Share this with your teacher *after* they agree to write your letter.

- What I appreciated about your class:
- One project or assignment I'm proud of:
- How I grew in your class:
- My goals for college:
- What I hope to study:
- Activities or projects outside of school:
- Three words I'd use to describe myself:
- Anything else you should know about me:



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Email Templates

Initial Email Request (*only if you're not able to ask in person*)

Subject: Letter of Recommendation Request

Hi [Teacher's Name],

I hope you're doing well! I'm reaching out to ask if you'd feel comfortable writing me a letter of recommendation for my college applications. I really enjoyed your class, especially [mention something specific you appreciated], and I think you've seen me grow in ways that colleges would value.

If you're open to it, I'll send over a short list of schools I'm applying to, deadlines, and a quick brag sheet to make it easier for you to write the letter.

Thank you for considering this. I know your time is valuable, and I'd be really grateful for your support!

Best,
[Your Name]

Follow Up Email (*2–3 weeks before LORs are due*)

Subject: Quick Follow Up (LOR)

Hi [Teacher's Name],

I just wanted to check in to see if you might need anything from me for the letter of recommendation. I know it's a busy time of year, so no pressure, just wanted to make sure it didn't get buried!

Happy to resend my brag sheet or deadlines if helpful. Thanks again!

Best,
[Your Name]

Thank You Note (*after LOR is submitted*)

Subject: Thank you!

Hi [Teacher's Name],

I just wanted to say thank you again for writing my letter of recommendation. I really appreciate your time and support. It means a lot to have someone who's seen my growth and learning write on my behalf.

Thanks again for everything!

Best,
[Your Name]