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OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

**Letters of  
Recommendation  
2015-2016**



**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF LAW**

## Letters of Recommendation<sup>1</sup>

### 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 and/or achievements. It is a formal document, and should be typed on letterhead, and written in a professional manner.

During your law school career and thereafter, it is possible that you will need letters of recommendation to accompany applications for internships, externships, judicial clerkships, and ultimately legal jobs.

When a potential employer requests a recommendation letter, take the opportunity to enhance your reputation for professionalism by following some basic guidelines.

### Who can I ask to write a letter of recommendation?

If you want to ensure you receive the best possible recommendation, be selective about whom you ask for a reference letter. Potential employers are interested in hearing about your legal analysis, practical experience, academic success and research and writing skills. Your references should consist of a hybrid of former employers and academicians so that the potential employer receives information regarding your overall qualifications.

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

#### *Non-Legal Employers and Undergraduate Professors*

Non-legal employers will be able to speak to your general workplace skills and professionalism. Similarly, undergraduate professors know something about your work habits, personal characteristics and general intellect.

#### *Law Professors and Former Legal Employers*

Consider asking professors<sup>2</sup> or legal employers to write recommendation letters for you. 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. Former or current legal employers with whom you have a positive relationship are also good candidates for recommendation letters. You

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted, with permission, from the University of Miami School of Law Recommendation Guide.

should request a letter from a current employer only if you are on good terms with the employer, and you are sure that he or she will respond positively to news that you are leaving. If your current employer does not know you are applying for other jobs, it is fine not to ask for a letter.

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

| <b>Employers</b>  | <b>Professors</b>                     |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Previous positions held in the company  | Grades in a particular class          |
| Summary of job responsibilities   | Attendance and participation in class |
| Strengths, skills and talents<br>Initiative, dedication, integrity, reliability, etc.<br>Ability to work with a team and/or independently |                                       |

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

Timing is important. Do not procrastinate. Avoid the last minute scenario. 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. Therefore, asking someone for a reference letter the night before it is due, or the same day you need it, is not appropriate. Waiting until the last minute may make you look irresponsible. A close deadline may also mean that a person will not have time to give the letter the required attention, or to even write it at all. So, a good rule of thumb is to make your request as far in advance as possible.

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. If an application deadline is close and you are not sure whether a recommender has submitted a letter, or you are waiting for a letter to arrive so you can send your entire application packet together, then follow up with the writer. Most people will appreciate the reminder and will be happy to send you a confirmation e-mail when the letter is sent.

**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 such as 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 requesting a letter of recommendation, you should:

1. Articulate your reasons for the recommendation, 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. 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.
2. Provide your resume so that the recommender can review your experiences and comment specifically on your qualifications. Be prepared to provide a writing sample and/or your transcript as well, in case the recommender wants to review your writing skills.
3. 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. 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.
4. While many recommenders prefer to use their own letterhead envelopes and stationery to prepare letters of recommendation, offer to provide stamped envelopes in which to send the letters as a courtesy to the recommenders.
5. Finally, 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?**

Once the person commits to writing a letter, you can make it easy for him or her by providing some of the basic information. For example, the name 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.

Feel free to 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.” If you think you are asking for something unreasonable, then do not ask. Another thing you can do is offer to write a draft of the recommendation letter for the recommender. Sometimes, people are more than willing to accommodate your request, but they find it difficult due to time constraints.

Therefore, offering to write the letter for them can alleviate the situation and also makes it easier for the recommender. If he or she refuses the request, then leave it alone.

\*Obviously, if the recommender opts to write the letter and does not accept your offer to draft it for him or her, you would not make these suggestions regarding content and let them write their own letter.

## **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.

**Hint!** 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.

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.

## **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."

**Hint!** 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 or its listing on Martindale Hubbell.

## SAMPLE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Mary Sue Smith  
Law Offices of Mary Sue Smith  
1234 Main Street  
Dallas, Texas 75090  
(789) 654-321  
mssmith@smithlaw.net

August 1, 2015

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  
(123) 456-789  
sstein@law.tamu.edu  
August 1, 2015

Dear Sir or Madam:

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

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

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

Veronica also had interests outside of academics. She 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. Veronica 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 her personal characteristics, Veronica is extremely charismatic, focused, determined, outgoing and friendly. I feel very confident that she will be extremely successful in all her future endeavors. I highly recommend her for the Northern Fellowship in Human Rights.

Sincerely,

Professor Samuel Stein