

HOW TO REQUEST LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

By Janis Dickinson

Honorable students and postdocs: It is a hugely important part of my job to write letters on your behalf to help you obtain grant funding, fellowships, grad school appointments, summer research experiences, postdocs, and jobs! Requests come in many forms and so I thought I would take the time to outline how requests should be made to help me ensure that your letter does not fall through the cracks and that I can efficiently write the best letter possible.

1. Make it easy – yours may be one of 10-12 or more requests, each with multiple letters required!

a. It is fine to paste the information into an email, but however you present it please be sure to start your email with the number of letters you need and the deadline for each. In other words, put the important info up front. Long letters are difficult to wade through - the more you organize the info for your referees, the easier it is for them to do a good job.

b. Assume each letter has to have a header, because it will be written on stationery and uploaded.* Provide the header for each. For example:

Dr. Simon Blink, Selection Committee Chair
XYZ funding opportunity
Street address
Town, State Zip

If necessary, Google the target department or funding agency to get the header.

If you do not do this, I will have to, and that makes me a little grouchy.

c. Following the header, place a short, distilled, one line synopsis of the job title, grad program, advisor's interests, or funding opportunity (e.g., nature of position, requirements/fit).

d. List as bullet points examples of how your project fits the funding opportunity and why it should be funded

OR why you are particularly suitable for this position. You get the idea!

The shorter the better: no long text, just the main ideas.

e. Provide any spectacular info or anecdotes about yourself that you believe make for a good presentation of your character and abilities.

e. Provide the relevant materials – job letter, research/teaching interests, CV, proposal, program description, list of courses you have taken if applicable

MOST IMPORTANTLY: I'LL CLOSE THE LOOP – CHECK BEFORE DEADLINE TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE HEARD FROM ME! IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD, I HAVEN'T DONE IT.