

Teacher Recommendation Letters for College Applications Frequently Asked Questions

Q. When do I need a teacher recommendation letter?

- A.** Generally only private colleges ask for teacher recommendation letters. In particular:
- Private schools using the Common Application require two teacher recommendation letters.
 - Other private schools may ask for either one or two teacher recommendation letters.
 - UC's do **not** ask for nor do they accept teacher recommendation letters.

Q. What teachers should I ask?

- A.** Choose teachers from academic classes, such as a science, math, English, history, or a foreign language (unless your college major will be in the visual or performing arts, such as fashion, music or studio art). Teachers from your junior year are generally best because they have taught you most recently. Another option might be a teacher from your sophomore or senior year who also knows you in another capacity (perhaps as a club advisor or coach).

Q. What information are colleges looking for from teachers?

- A.** Colleges want teachers to talk about you based on what they saw you do in class and in organizations which the teachers advise. They want to know what strengths you would bring to their classroom environment. They do not want teachers to rehash your resume. A teacher's letter should contain information not provided elsewhere in your application.

Q. What should I give teachers to help them write their letters?

- A.** At a minimum, write a short letter, thanking them for agreeing to help you with your application and stating why you are applying to certain schools, what you plan to major in, and perhaps the career you are considering. You might want to ask them what else they would like you to provide to help them with writing their letters. For example, you could offer to provide a copy of your college essays, copies of one or two papers you did for the teacher and/or your resume. You might also offer to meet with the teacher to explain your goals and interests.

No matter how much a teacher likes you, s/he may not remember specific details of your performance without you providing reminders. However, keep in mind that providing only your resume may encourage the teacher to inadvertently focus more on your grades and extracurricular activities than on a first-hand perspective of who you are and what makes you unique. (A teacher telling a story about you and things you have done in or out of the classroom is more likely to have authenticity and more likely to share something that is reflective of your skills, strengths, and personal characteristics.)

Q. Should I waive my right to see the recommendation?

- A.** Yes. Pick teachers who feel comfortable writing a recommendation letter for you, give them whatever additional input you and they think will be valuable, and then give them the courtesy of not checking up on what they say. Teachers will choose to share their letters with you or they will not.