

Letters of Recommendation from Stephen

I receive many requests for letters of recommendation throughout the year. In general, I am happy to help students with their applications, but I can do a better job and help you more if you observe the following guidelines:

1. Don't ask me for a letter if you have never had a conversation with me. It does not help you to get a letter that says "I had Biff in my class and he got an A+." Whomever you are applying to can see from your transcript what marks you received, and what they are looking for in my letter is detailed information about your character, your academic strengths (and weaknesses), and how you will fit in to their operation.
2. In your request, be very clear about where you are sending the application, when it is due, how many copies you need, whom it should be addressed to, *etc.* I do not have time to find out this information, so if you want it done correctly you must find out for me.
3. Tell me as much as you can that will help me to write a strong letter for you. If you volunteer in the hospital, let me know. If you are a tutor, or have received any academic awards, tell me so that I can mention it. If you have any special talents or interests that are particularly relevant to your application you should mention those too. The more details I have about who you are and what you bring to the position, the stronger my letter will be.
4. Plan in advance so that you can ask me once for all of the letters you will need. This simplifies my work, and therefore makes me more favorably disposed towards you.
5. When you ask anyone to write you a letter of recommendation, be sure to ask them specifically whether they can write you a good letter... there are people out there who will write an honest letter even if they do not think well of you, thereby sabotaging your chances of success.