

Here are some general suggestions for students (and former students) requesting a letter of recommendation (for jobs, internships, study abroad programs, etc., but *especially* for competitive graduate or professional schools):

First, you should know that almost all letters of recommendation are positive. In most cases, if someone feels unable to write a positive letter on your behalf, they won't -- and shouldn't -- agree to write one at all. That's good and bad. It means that you shouldn't worry too much about 'bad' letters. *But* it also means that a brief, general letter won't help you.

What admissions and hiring committees look for, then, is an indication that the person writing the letter knows you reasonably well, understands the requirements of the sort of program you are applying for, and can offer substantive reasons why they would want to admit or hire you.

For me -- or anyone else -- to write this sort of letter requires your preparation and help. The more information that you can provide me (within reason!) the more specific a letter I am able to write on your behalf. First, of course, I need to know what you are applying for: specific programs, schools, jobs, etc. The kind of letter needed to apply for a study abroad semester is quite different than applying to a Ph.D. program! Second, I need information about you. Below is stuff that I find helpful. Not everyone needs to provide all of this and some might not be relevant in your case. But the more you provide, the more likely that I can write a letter that will help you achieve your goals:

- ☐ Brief summary of your experience in my courses (remind me which semesters you were enrolled) or other ways I know you.
- ☐ Description of any papers or projects you completed with me that you are especially proud of, or that are relevant to your application. Provide a copy if possible.
- ☐ A draft of your statement of purpose/application essay/cover letter (you should allow time to revise this multiple times).
- ☐ Your own description of why you are applying for this sort of program, what experiences have led you to this choice, etc.
- ☐ Your college transcripts, resume, or other relevant documents.

Once you give this information to me, along with any relevant forms, links, etc., I expect at least 2-3 weeks to write your letter. Be sure to check back a few days prior to the date that applications must be sent to confirm that I have done so.

Finally: keep me informed!!! Let me know whether you get admitted or hired! Let me know how it's going if you do!