



**COLORADO
COLLEGE**

Career Center



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Letters of Recommendation VS. References

Letters of recommendation are testimonials by professors, past employers, or extracurricular advisors regarding your abilities, skills, and character.

Know the difference between “references” and “letters of recommendation” before you ask someone to write a letter for you. If an application asks for references, you need only submit a list of names and contact information, *not* a letter from each individual on your list. See the back of this sheet for more information on References.

Letters of Recommendation: Laying the Groundwork

We’re going to let you in on a secret: **the key to getting a great recommendation every time is building meaningful and enduring relationships with faculty and staff early on.**

- **Start building these relationships early.** Interact with your professors face-to-face. If you’re undeclared but have some ideas about what you want to major in, introduce yourself to faculty in that department. They are here because they care about students; just remember to be respectful of their time.
- **Be genuine.** Faculty and staff are people, and they can tell when you’re using them. Approaching a professor with whom you’ve put in the effort to develop a respectful relationship is very different than approaching someone you had for one block two years ago.
- **Maintaining relationships is ongoing.** Don’t disappear after the block is over, or after you graduate. Check in occasionally, ask questions, share what you’re up to—*especially* if they wrote you a recommendation for it!
- **Remember your advisor.** Advising can, and should, be more than points! Whether you’re undeclared or you’ve asked a faculty member in your department, your advisor is here to help *you*. Set up meetings outside of course registration to get to know them.

By your junior year, you should be able to identify several faculty members who you could comfortably approach about recommendations. Remember that you may need letters before then.

If you have not developed relationships with faculty and staff or if you are unsure how to start, please come talk to someone in the Career Center.

Making the Ask

Begin the process *at least* four weeks before you need the letter. Many recommenders will not be able to help with short turn-around times. Also follow these steps when asking someone to be a telephone reference.

1. Select recommenders that are familiar with your work and who can speak highly of your talents and abilities.
2. Ask potential recommenders if they are willing and able to write a strong letter of support on your behalf. If they express reservations, search for an alternative. A weak or lackluster letter will harm your case.
3. Some faculty have instructions to follow or forms you must complete for them to write a letter for you. Search faculty on the CC website to find out.

Information to Give to Your Recommender

Make an appointment with your recommender. Discuss the following and write it down for them.

- Indicate why this opportunity is a good fit for you. Share your interests, background, goals, and qualifications.
- Bring your resume, job description, transcripts, personal statement, application materials, and any other information about the position or grad school that might be helpful.
- Provide details about your academic work that is relevant to your application.
- Bring any forms or guidelines for the recommender, including the addressee and their full mailing address.

Highlight the due dates. Provide an envelope with the address clearly printed and sufficient postage.

Thank You

1. A week or so before the letter is due, confirm with your recommender(s) it has been or will be sent on time.
2. Send a thank you note or email to each person who has written you a letter of recommendation.
3. Keep your recommenders updated on your job or graduate school search, and let them know when you've accepted a position.

References

- Typically, employers will ask you to submit a list of 3-5 references during the hiring process. Some applications will specify who these should be (e.g., former supervisors or faculty members), while others leave it up to you. Choose someone who has had significant contact with you and will speak highly of you.
- Provide potential references with your resume and ask if they are willing and able to speak well of your abilities. If they express reservations, find someone else; a weak or lackluster reference can harm your case. Keep it professional; avoid friends and family members unless instructed to provide personal references.
- Note that your references **do not** write letters of recommendation; you simply provide their contact information to the employer.
- References should be on a **separate piece of paper than your resume** following the heading format you used on your resume, unless specifically instructed otherwise. Check that all contact information for the people you list is accurate and current.

Sample Format

Your Name

Current Address
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number
YourName@ColoradoCollege.edu

Permanent Address
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number
Email@

References

Name
Title
Address
Daytime Phone
Email
Relationship (optional)

Name
Title
Address
Daytime Phone
Email
Relationship (optional)

And so on for 1-3 more references.