



# Letters of Recommendation

Presentation by Todd Baird, Ph.D.

# Letters of Recommendation

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- Importance
- How Many
- Whom Should I ask
- How Should I approach Potential Letter Writers
- Getting Good Letters of Recommendation
- Do graduate schools care about confidentiality

# Importance of Letters

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- Grades and Tests Scores (Most Important Factor)
- Letters of Recommendation (A Deciding Factor)
  - Can be the deciding factor for your acceptance
  - Strengthen your application
  - Can clarify or outweigh deficiencies in your application

# Whom Should I Ask?

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- Someone who knows you well
- Someone with the title of “Professor”
- Someone at the school granting your baccalaureate degree
- Someone who has earned the degree for which you are seeking
- Someone who has academically evaluated you in an upper division class
- Do not ask family, friends, political figures, or the like. These are usually detrimental.

# Whom Should I Ask?

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- Who knows you well enough to comment on your ability to succeed at the graduate level?
  - A professor of an upper division course
    - Seminars, Research Methods, Directed Readings, Projects and Research, Psych Practicum
    - Speak up in class, ask questions, take more than one class from a professor, meet with them during office hours
  - Supervisor in a work related field
    - Not as powerful
- The typical number of letters required is (3-5)
  - Send only the number requested

# Approaching Faculty

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- Request a letter of recommendation in person
- Approach them preferably two months before the deadline. **Absolute minimum is two weeks**
- Ask the faculty member or the employer
  - Would you be willing to write a letter of recommendation?
  - Do you feel you know me well enough to write a strong letter?
- Be prepared to discuss your interest and reasons for attending graduate school
- Schedule an appointment with your recommenders
- If you take time off before graduate school request a letter to be written and then have the letter writer update it when you do apply for graduate school

# Organize, Organize, Organize

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- In your meeting with your recommender, provide a folder with the following:
  - Addresses of Schools to which you are applying and the Application Deadlines
  - Addressed & Stamped Envelops
  - Rating forms (paper clipped to the corresponding envelop)
  - How you can be reached if necessary
  - A portfolio

# Provide Information to the Writer

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- Assume that your letter writer will remember nothing. You should provide all information you would like to have appear in the letter of recommendation.
  - Your GPA and Transcripts
  - A List of relevant courses taken
  - Titles and abstracts of any research papers you have written
  - Honor societies to which you belong
  - Awards that you have won
  - Activities in which you have participated (professionally relevant only)
  - Relevant work experience
  - Service activities such as volunteer work
  - A description of your professional goals
  - Copies of admissions essays, personal statements, & cover letters
  - Information about your experiences with the letter writer (e.g., courses taken, copies of papers, etc.)
    - <http://gradschool.about.com/cs/askingforletters/f/recfaq1.htm>: Tara Kuther, Ph.D.



# Final Notes

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- We want to help you succeed. You will be nervous asking but you don't need to be.
  - Remember that your professor's reputation is associated with the letter and your performance
  - Your performance at graduate school may impact other WSU students from being accepted
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- Reciprocate by sending a thank you note
  - You may need a reference in the future