

Letters of Recommendation

personal suggestions

Don McCarthy (January 24, 2018)

- REUs and internships are competitive!
 - *“The key is not the will to win... everybody has that. It is the will to prepare to win that is important.”* (Coach Bobby Knight)
 - So, we must both plan ahead!
- Letters are not a simple formality:
 - They carry weight
 - They require creative work
 - They are time-consuming to write and to submit
- Selecting recommenders
- The submission process
- Content
- Helping your recommenders

REUs are Competitive!

How can WE compete?

- Preparation:
 - Budget your personal time – start early!
 - Ask recommenders early (respect their time)

 - Get to know your professors in advance
 - Do something unique!
 - Just earning an “A” may not be enough

 - Select strong, relevant recommenders
 - ASTR 196 (1 unit) from 1-2 years ago may not carry much weight
 - Are the writers relevant to your goals?

- Prepare the recommenders

Content

How will your letter stand out among 100-200?

- Assemble with care:
 - Formal format: Letterhead & signature; addressee
 - Not an informal email
 - What is omitted may be as important as what's included.
- What are you applying for exactly and why?
- Relationship: How long and in what capacity?
- What makes you unique? (skills & GRIT)
 - When did you exceed requirements?
 - Do you finish what you start?
 - Do you interact and ask questions?
 - Can you work both independently and in teams?
 - What are the dynamics of your GPA and personal growth?

The Process of Recommendation

every process is different

- Recommenders are often asked to rank students as well as to write letters
 - How can you stand out?
 - What if many students have the same recommender?
- Sometimes we must cut/paste our letter into sections of a form
 - We often do not know prior to starting the process.
- Usually letters are uploaded to sites but sometimes emailed to people.
 - Many are time-consuming!
 - Special logins and accounts
 - Different browsers, file formats, subject lines, ...
 - Sometimes the site isn't working or is outdated!

How to Help Your Recommenders put yourself in their shoes

- Ask early!
 - Meet in person to discuss your goals
- Do not ask to see, or handle, the letter

- Do your homework in populating your application information early
 - Many Web sites will then contact the recommender
 - Waive your right of review (confidentiality is important)
 - Input the recommender's name, title, institution, address, phone, email,

- Provide a single document:
 - A single list of REUs including Web sites, deadlines, recipients
 - Ordered by deadlines
 - How to submit:
 - Name of REU program or internship. Recipient names? Special criteria?
 - Method of submission: Email, upload, special Web site?

- Provide your personal statement or resume
 - Feel free to make suggestions that might align with your statement

Followup

- Remind us of upcoming deadlines
 - Check your application online to see if completed
- Tell us the outcome of each application – promptly
- Send a postcard during the summer