

Letters of Recommendation

WHAT ARE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION USED FOR?

Letters of recommendation (LORs) demonstrate to an admissions committee that someone (besides you) thinks you are a qualified candidate for law school. Admissions committees are not impressed with who writes the letters; rather, they are impressed about what is written. They frequently see letters from "big names" (government representatives, successful lawyers, industry tycoons) and most are generic and general. As one Dean of Admissions stated, "If a senator really wanted the candidate to be accepted, they wouldn't be writing a letter—they would be calling me on the phone." On the other hand, another Dean of Admissions once said that her favorite letter was written by the supervisor of janitorial staff who did not have the best language skills, but praised the candidate's work ethic and character in such a way that the committee could not refuse him acceptance into their law school.

HOW MANY LETTERS DO I NEED?

It varies by school. In order to be prepared to apply for any school, we recommend that you get three letters – usually two academic letters (ideally, one should be from a professor in your major) and one professional letter, preferably a boss or supervisor. Most law schools do not take letters from family friends seriously. Law schools prefer letters from someone who has supervised you in a professional setting. If you have been out of school for more than three years and are no longer in contact with any of your professors, you can send letters from work supervisors or colleagues instead. However, a letter from a professor that you have stayed in touch with is particularly impressive.

WHERE DO I HAVE THE WRITERS SEND THE LETTERS?

Most law schools require that you use CAS for your LORs. After signing the letter, the recommender must upload, mail, or fax the letter directly to LSAC with the link or LOR form provided by you to the letter writer. LSAC will only send your letters to a law school after they have been assigned by you to a specific law school.

HOW FAR IN ADVANCE SHOULD I ASK MY WRITERS TO WRITE THE LETTERS?

You should give each writer two weeks to one month (at least) to draft the letter. Because you should aim for early November as your application deadline, you will want to give all the materials to your writers by October 1, at the latest.

HOW DO I CREATE A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION REQUEST FORM?

There are two ways to send in a letter of recommendation: 1) electronically or 2) by creating a letter of recommendation request form. This form is an essential part of CAS processing as it ensures an accurate match of your letter to your account. To create this form, log into your CAS account and click on "Letters of Recommendation" then click on "Add Recommender."

- Complete the letter writer's contact information.
- List how many letters this letter writer will provide. For example, if a letter writer is sending two letters, one tailored to Creighton University and one sent to all other law schools you will want to place a "2" in this field.
- Complete the letter description. This description is provided by LSAC to aid you in the application process and can also be viewed by law schools that receive this letter. If the letter writer is only writing one letter an appropriate description is, "General Use." If the letter writer is writing multiple letters, for each letter you will need to create a letter of recommendation request form and then have the letter writer upload or attach the letter to the appropriate form. For example, if the letter writer is writing a letter to all law schools and a specific letter tailored to "Creighton University," you would need to create two letter of recommendation request forms. One with a description "General Use" and one with a description "Creighton University." The letter of recommendation writer should check the description on the form or email they receive from LSAC to make sure they attach the letter that matches your description when uploading/sending the letter to LSAC.

WHAT SHOULD I GIVE MY WRITERS IN ORDER TO WRITE THE LETTERS?

In order to make this process as easy as possible, do the following:

- Thank them for being willing to take the time to write you an LOR.
- Provide a bulleted list reminding the letter writer of your accomplishments. For example, “In your class I received an A and on my paper you stated that it was one of the best papers of the semester.”
- Include a list of the schools you are applying to and a deadline for the letter to be sent to LSAC.
- Include the “Letter to LOR Writers” drafted by the Prelaw Advisor (if necessary).
- Include a copy of your résumé, transcript, and perhaps a paper you wrote in their class or your personal statement (if finished).
- Put everything in one large envelope, hand deliver if possible, or follow-up immediately to make sure they received it.
- If your letter writers are not submitting their letters electronically, provide them with the “Letter of Recommendation Request Form,” and a pre-addressed and stamped envelope. If they are providing more than one letter, provide them with multiple envelopes to keep the letters separate.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY WRITERS TO WRITE?

Usually academic letter writers will have written hundreds of letters of recommendation and will not need advice on what to write. However, many times non-academic letter writers do not know what to write about. In either case, we have prepared a letter that you can give to your letter writers that will explain what recommendation letters are used for and what discussions are helpful. You can view this letter on our website - ppa.byu.edu/pre-law-handouts

DO I NEED TO FOLLOW-UP WITH MY WRITERS?

Absolutely. People get busy and writing letters of recommendation is usually not at the top of the priority list. If you have not received an email notification that a letter has been received, contact your letter writer a few days before your prescribed deadline to determine the status of the letter. Do not allow your application to remain incomplete because an absentminded professor forgot to send in your letter and you failed to follow-up.

ASSIGNING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

To access each individual school’s application CAS requests that you enter the law school’s name. After entering the law school and beginning the application you will be asked to “assign” the letters received by CAS that are to be sent to that law school. Once the letters are assigned and you have applied to the law school, copies of LORs processed by LSAC will be made available to each of the specified law schools.