

Guidelines for Job References and Letters of Recommendation

Job References

If you are applying for a job and would like to list me as a reference, it would be helpful for me to know:

- Something about the requirements for the position
- Your experience, skills, and talents that you think match with the position
- What kind of information you think that I can provide your potential employer based on our interactions
- When you will need the reference

It is best if you can come to office hours and discuss the position with me when asking if I will serve as a reference. Please bring a current resume and any relevant job descriptions with you.

During winter and summer breaks, I am busy with my own research and writing, so it may take a few e-mail messages from you to get an answer from me.

Information you will need for references:

Name: Tressie McMillan Cottom, Ph.D.

Title: Assistant Professor of Sociology

Employer: Virginia Commonwealth University

Address: Richmond, VA 23284-2543

Phone: 804-828-0735 (NB: I can't remember the last time I checked my campus voice mail so e-mail is best)

e-mail: tmcottom@vcu.edu

Letters of Recommendation for Graduate School

If you would like me to write letters of recommendation for admission to graduate school, it is important that we meet in person to discuss your goals. Please schedule a time to meet with me by emailing me for an appointment. Please bring in drafts of your writing sample and personal statement when we meet. If you have moved or can't get to campus, we can arrange to talk via phone, and you can email your materials to me.

I will give you an honest assessment of the kind of letter I feel that I can write for you either at our meeting or after I have given it some thought. In order to present a competitive portfolio, you only want enthusiastic, glowing letters in your file.

I am able to write best for students who have shown me that they already possess the qualities necessary to succeed in graduate school. Generally speaking, students who go on to succeed in graduate school have:

- Earned a B+ or higher in classes they took with me
- Contributed to class discussion (quality counts more than quantity)
- Demonstrated professional student behavior (regular attendance, punctuality, following directions)
- Showed independence and maturity

If we agree that I will write on your behalf, please follow the instructions below.

One month before the earliest deadline provide a clearly marked folder containing the following:

1. Your transcript (unofficial copy is fine).
2. CV. This is your resume formatted into academic style. See web resources.
3. Personal Statement draft(s). If only small amounts of information are different in your various personal statements, one representative statement will do. An advanced draft of a personal statement is acceptable.

4. If you still have them, include a sample assignment or paper that you completed in my course. If you have completed it, a draft of the writing sample that you will be submitting with your graduate applications.
5. Completed forms for any schools requiring mailed recommendations. You need to have filled out the student information section and indicated whether you waive your right to see the recommendation. Waiving your right to see your letters of recommendation makes committees take those letters more seriously. SIGN your forms!
6. An organized list of all schools, including application due dates in chronological order with the earliest deadline first, the specific program and area to which you are applying, and indication of what needs to happen with each letter of recommendation. This should include the name and mailing address of the department to which you are applying so that I can personalize each letter.
7. If the program does not do online applications, email the graduate secretary to tell him or her that your professor insists on submitting a .pdf of the recommendation form and letter of recommendation. If they balk, I'm still willing to send it via snail mail.
8. Separately from the folder: email links to online recommendation sites as you complete your applications.
9. Every few weeks during the deadline period, send an updated list (see #6) of schools and deadlines to indicate whether or not you have submitted your online application.

Two weeks before the first deadline:

Email me reminders every five days until I email you back to indicate that I have sent or submitted recommendations. I do not consider this nagging whatsoever. (Ask other references their personal preferences for being reminded.)

Disclaimer

If I do not have all of the above information and reminders, I cannot guarantee that I will follow through with letters. It is not because I don't care; it is because I have about 20 other things going on at the same time as letters are due.

Remember that everyone writing letters of recommendation for you is taking extra time out of his or her very busy schedule, usually at a hectic time of year. It is your responsibility to make the process as easy as possible for your writers. Thank you notes are not a bad idea, either. Whatever happens, please let me know the outcomes.