

Requesting Letters of Recommendation and References

Most employers in any industry will want to hear from people who can speak to your abilities and work habits. This may come in the form of **References** or **Letters of Recommendation**. What's the difference?

- A **Reference** is the person. When requested, you will provide their name and contact information to an employer who will contact the reference directly.
 - **Tip:** There is no need to include references or “references available upon request” on your resume. If an employer requests references, you will create a separate document with the information.
- A **Letter of Recommendation** is the actual written recommendation prepared by someone who knows your work. Depending on the application process, you may or may not see the actual letter. Do not submit a letter unless the employer requests one.
 - **Tip:** Allow them enough time to write a good letter and to prioritize their schedule and obligations. When possible, be cognizant of timing when you request letters. Will the professor be busy grading? Is the attorney preparing for a trial or a closing? Reaching out early to inquire into their timing and availability will help everyone as opposed to waiting until the deadlines are approaching.

Communication with References and Recommenders

- Selecting References and Recommenders should be intentional – think about what each person adds to your application. This is especially true for judicial clerkships – consider what the judge is seeking in a clerk and how each individual can help demonstrate that you possess the desired skills and qualities.
 - **Tip:** If you have options, you don't need three people to say the same thing or to repeat your transcript. Find people who played diverse roles in your experiences (e.g., professors, advisors, coaches, or employers) so they can add something distinct and valuable. For judicial clerkships you will usually need three letters of recommendation – it is customary for two of those to be professors.
- For both References and Letters of Recommendation, contact the individual first to request their assistance.
 - **Tip:** The individual should never hear from the employer before they have agreed to serve as your reference or write a letter on your behalf. If that happens, the employer will likely pick up on this.
- Meet or speak with the individual to discuss your experience and your interest in certain jobs and fields. You want them to feel they know enough about you and your interests to best support your application.
 - **Tip:** Provide a copy of your current resume, especially if some time has passed since they worked with you closely or had you in class.
- For Letters of Recommendation, tell the individual when you need the letter and where to submit it.
 - **Tip:** Make sure you clarify whether the letter should be submitted to you or to the employer – if the latter, provide accurate contact information including name, title, and address.
- Keep the individual updated when you plan to use them again for future job applications.
 - **Tip:** The individual should never be surprised by a new employer contacting them – they should know if you are using them for more jobs than originally requested. Again, if an individual sounds surprised when an employer contacts them, it won't reflect well on you or your application.
- Always thank the individual for assisting you in your job search.
 - **Tip:** Just like a job interview, a thank you note (handwritten, e-mail) is very much appreciated.
- Keep them posted! These individuals would love to know how things go so keep them updated.