Requests for Letters of Recommendation

As you probably know, letters of recommendation often play a significant role in your applications to graduate schools, jobs, and other career oriented endeavors. I’ve written this handout to make sure that you get the letter you need and that you receive it on time.

For whom will I write?
The bottom line is that I need to know you well to write an informed and meaningful letter. I will likely agree to write you a letter even if you’ve only had one class from me, but you should know that it will not be nearly as impactful as the person who has taken multiple classes with me or who has worked on a research project with me of some type.

What do I need from you?

IF GIVEN THE OPTION, PLEASE DO NOT OPT FOR ELECTRONIC LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO WRITE A LETTER AND SUBMIT IT VIA THE MAIL.

To accomplish the task of writing an informed letter for you that will arrive to the institution/employer on time, I ask of you the following:

A large manila envelope containing the following information:

1) An unofficial transcript
2) Your personal statement (if applying to graduate school)
3) Your G.R.E. scores (if applying to graduate school)
4) The forms that accompany the letter I will be sending. Please fill out all of these forms as completely as possible, including information about me. THIS INCLUDES THE ELECTRONIC FORMS THAT YOU FILL OUT FOR ME AS WELL. If given the choice by schools between online submission of letters of recommendation and the traditional means, please opt for the latter option. Please fill in the following information for me if requested on the form:
   Name: Matthew Hertenstein; Address: DePauw University, 123 Harrison Hall, Greencastle, IN 46135; Phone: 765/658-4609; Fax: 765/658-4572; e-mail: mhertenstein@depauw.edu; Title/Position: Associate Professor of Psychology
5) Preaddressed stamped envelopes. Be sure to type the address on them and include the following return address: Matt Hertenstein, Ph.D.; DePauw University; 123 Harrison Hall; Greencastle, IN, 46135. (Exception: If you must include my letter in your application package, give me an envelope with your name and address on it so I can mail it to you.)
6) Your completed "Information that Can Help Me Write You a Strong Letter of Recommendation for a Job (or Graduate School)" form (see below).
7) Make a list on the front of the file folder of each school or employer to which a letter is to be sent, followed by these four pieces of information:
   a. the deadline by which the graduate school or employer must receive my letter,
   b. where the letter is to be sent (i.e., the employer, the graduate school or to you),
   c. if there is a form that I must complete in addition to my letter, and
   d. the specific graduate program (e.g., masters in school psychology) or job (e.g., substance abuse counselor) for which you are applying.
8) Write your telephone number and e-mail address on the folder so that I can contact you if I need any clarifications.
9) Last, but not least, I need time. Give me this folder at least one month before the earliest deadline of your letters so I have sufficient time to write an excellent letter of recommendation for you. Effective letters of recommendation take time to write, so please do not put me in the position of having to rush this important process. Please remember the old saying, “A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.”

One other important point: PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE let me know if your application was accepted or not. If I’m writing a letter for you, I most likely have a personal interest in your future and I would like to know how things turn out.
**Information That Will Enable Me to Write You a Strong Letter of Recommendation for Graduate School**

Your Name: 

Classes you took from me, when you took the courses, and the grades you received: 

The results of a survey of 143 graduate programs in clinical, experimental, and industrial-organizational psychology (Appleby, Herbstrith, & Mauer, 1999) indicated the following skills and characteristics (listed in order of their rated importance) are what these programs are most interested in learning about candidates from letters of recommendation. One of the most successful ways in which you can convince a graduate school admissions committee that you possess these skills and characteristics is to have the people who write your letters of recommendation describe you as a person who possesses them. In order to help me write the strongest letter I can for you, please provide me with a specific example of something you have done during your college career that will allow me to say that you possess these skills and characteristics and will also allow me to support my statement with specific evidence. For example, if you want me to say that you are “motivated and hard-working,” then remind me how you often went the extra mile when carrying out a research project or how you wrote a paper in my course that went well beyond the assignment. It is unnecessary for you to fill in all the blanks; no one possesses all these skills and characteristics. Give this task some careful thought. Your time will be well spent, and I will be able to write you a stronger letter of recommendation.

**Motivated and hard-working**

**High intellectual/scholarly ability**

**Research skills**

**Emotionally stable and mature**

**Writing skills**

**Speaking skills**

**Teaching skills/potential**
Works well with others

Creative and original

Strong knowledge of area of study

Strong character or integrity

Special skills (e.g., computer or lab)

Capable of analytical thought

Broad general knowledge

Intellectually independent

Possesses leadership ability

Reference

Information That Will Enable Me to Write You a Strong Letter of Recommendation for a Job

Your Name: ________________________________________________________________

Classes you took from me, when you took them, and the grades you received:
________________________________________________________________________

A recent survey of employers (Appleby, 2000) willing to interview psychology majors indicated the following skills and characteristics (listed in order of their rated importance) are the most important in their hiring decisions. One of the best ways to convince a potential employer that you possess these skills and characteristics is for the people who write your letters of recommendation to describe you as a person who possesses them. Please provide me with specific examples of things you have done during your college career that will allow me to say that you possess these skills and characteristics and will also allow me to support my statement with specific evidence. For example, if you would like me to say that you have "shown initiative and persistence," you may want to describe how you proposed a new activity for Psi Chi or wrote a proposal to get IRB approval for your own project in my course. It is not necessary for you to fill in all the blanks; no one possesses all these skills and characteristics in equal strength. Give this task some careful thought. Your time will be well spent, I will appreciate your effort and, I will be able to write you a stronger letter of recommendation.

Deals effectively with a wide variety of people

________________________________________________________________________

Displays appropriate interpersonal skills

________________________________________________________________________

Listens carefully and accurately

________________________________________________________________________

Shows initiative and persistence

________________________________________________________________________

Exhibits effective time management

________________________________________________________________________

Holds high ethical standards and expects the same of others

________________________________________________________________________

Handles conflict successfully

________________________________________________________________________
Speaks articulately and persuasively

Works productively as a member of a team

Plans and carries out projects successfully

Thinks logically and creatively

Remains open-minded during controversies

Identifies and actualizes personal potential

Writes clearly and precisely

Adapts easily to organizational rules and procedures

Comprehends and retains key points from written materials

Gathers and organizes information from multiple sources

Reference