

# HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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## RECOMMENDATION REQUEST LETTER

A sketch detailing your academic attainments, as well as your extracurricular activities and your goals, rather than the impersonal resume, may greatly assist your professors in writing evaluations. It will refresh their memories since they sometimes do not draft the evaluation until days or weeks after talking with you. Additionally, many professors will not know "you" outside the classroom. Such a letter usually takes the form of a cover letter, but in many respects it should resemble an essay. It should progress logically and be well written.

The following are possible components of a typical request letter:

- A. **Introductory Paragraph:** Begin with an introductory paragraph, which reminds the faculty member of your identity. For example, explain that you have been a student in two of the professor's classes; tactfully reminding her or him of the grades you received. Mention the course. Once you have identified yourself, state your purpose in writing, i.e. to request an evaluation for graduate or professional school. Include your address, telephone number and e-mail address in case there are questions.
- B. **Your Background:** The largest portion of the sketch should address those aspects of your background with which the faculty member may not be familiar. Areas you may want to include are:
- Major and grade point average. You may wish to emphasize accomplishments.
  - Academic honors, prizes, awards, or accomplishments. If you are particularly proud of any such award, explain your reasons.
  - Internships, externships, and foreign study experience. If entrance to such programs was competitive, you should mention that fact.
  - The nature of any employment you have maintained during the school year. In this regard, mention the amount of responsibility you had and the number of hours you worked. If such employment helped to finance your education, estimate the percentage of your educational expenses that you have financed personally.
  - The nature of any summer employment you have held. Again, describe (briefly) the amount of responsibility you held. It might also be wise to summarize what you learned from your experience.
  - Any special circumstance which may have affected your academic progress or success. Explain these circumstances but don't make any excuses. It is often very helpful to have a faculty member comment upon a deviation in your academic record in the evaluation (if they understand the circumstances well).
  - Extracurricular activities: emphasize leadership roles you have filled and contributions you have made. Schools are more interested in why you participated or what you gained from the experience than in a list of activities.

- C. **Your Goals:** It is also often helpful to describe your academic, career, and professional goals, insofar as you know them. Try to make this section personal, particularly so that you will stand out from the many other students who may be asking for recommendations. You might also state your reasons for wishing to attend a particular kind of graduate or professional school and why you feel you can be successful.

Finally, when you speak with the professor, bring along other helpful supporting documents, such as a transcript, a recent writing sample, or **copies** of research papers, essay exams or other quality projects. The recommender can be more specific in describing your academic abilities if he/she does not have to rely on memory alone. Professors sometimes appreciate a small photograph, particularly if you must arrange for evaluations through the mails. You may want to refer the evaluator to certain topics which might be usefully emphasized.

Remember that a request should not only inform, it should also impress an evaluator with your writing skills. Thus, while you need not spend several hours drafting such a document, you must give it careful consideration and have it neatly typed. The enthusiasm you demonstrate to an evaluator is very often reflected in the evaluation itself.

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*You may email HPPLC at [recserve@indiana.edu](mailto:recserve@indiana.edu) to ask questions, communicate with advisors, and check your recommendation file. A calendar of events is available at [www.indiana.edu/~udivhpp](http://www.indiana.edu/~udivhpp).*

NOTE: This document has been prepared for Indiana University - Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.