

Requesting Letters of Recommendation for Law School



What is the Goal of a Letter of Recommendation?

One of the aims of the law school admissions process is to identify those individuals who have the intellectual and personal characteristics necessary to succeed in the law school classroom. To determine capacity to succeed, law schools rely on a variety of proxies including undergraduate GPA, LSAT score, and letters of recommendation.

In short, law schools want to know how you will perform in the law school classroom, and letters of recommendation from academic sources can inform law schools how you performed in the college classroom. Because law schools believe that your performance in the college classroom is a potential indicator of your ability to handle the rigors of law school coursework, they prefer letters from academic sources, including professors and TAs.

The academic title of the person writing the letter matters less than the substance of what he or she has to say about you. If the TA in a course can better speak to your abilities in the classroom, then you should request a letter from the TA rather than the professor.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to request one or more letters of recommendation from professionals who have supervised you in the workplace. Letters from academic sources are always preferable, but law schools understand that individuals who have been in the workplace for some time may not be able to secure letters of recommendation from former instructors. Similarly, some applicants may wish to supplement their academic letters of recommendation with a professional letter highlighting intellectual or other characteristics demonstrated during a job or internship.

When determining whom to approach for a letter of recommendation, you should identify individuals who have observed and can enthusiastically speak to characteristics that indicate your capacity to succeed in law school, including for example:

1. Intellectual Capacity

Analytical thinking, critical thinking, critical reading, reasoning skills, problem-solving skills, intellectual curiosity, capacity for abstract thought, etc.

2. Ability to Communicate

Strong writing and/or verbal skills, persuasiveness, articulateness, participation in class discussions, etc.

3. Other Characteristics

Motivation, diligence, maturity, organization, responsibility, attention to detail, professionalism, self-discipline, character/integrity, leadership, team player, etc.



Letters of recommendation are an important component of the law school admissions process. Most law schools require 1–2 letters, but as a general rule, it is ideal to submit 2–3 strong letters. This handout provides an overview of the process of requesting letters of recommendation.



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Letters of recommendation turn on relationships. To receive a strong letter of recommendation, you need to have devoted time to developing a strong relationship with the recommender. Be respectful of that relationship when you request letters of recommendation, and consider the following advice:

1. Request your letters of recommendation in person if at all possible (face-to-face or by telephone). Don't use e-mail unless your purpose is to set up a meeting or telephone conversation. A personal conversation gives you an additional opportunity to impress the recommender and helps ensure that the recommender has sufficient information about you to include in the letter.
2. Don't wait until the last minute to request your letters. Give your recommenders sufficient time to prepare their letters (ideally 6–8 weeks), and set deadlines at least 2–4 weeks before any application deadline. Recommenders may not write as strong of a letter or may miss their deadline if not given sufficient time to prepare the letter.
3. Provide your recommenders with a packet of information on which they can rely when drafting the letter. Include a résumé and work product from the course or a summary of work from the job/internship. If the recommender has not written a letter of recommendation for law school before, include a copy of the handout *Writing a Letter of Recommendation*.



DOs and DON'Ts When Choosing a Recommender

DO:

- Choose recommenders with sufficient first-person knowledge of your academic or professional abilities and characteristics. Family friends do not meet this standard unless they are also a former instructor or supervisor of yours.
- Try your best to identify two academic sources for letters of recommendation since law schools prefer this type of letter. Ideal sources include professors of one or more classes, thesis advisors, professors of independent study courses, seminar professors, or TAs for discussion sections.
- Choose recommenders who will be enthusiastic about your good qualities and will go to bat for you.

DON'T:

- Don't choose a recommender just because of his or her title. Law schools aren't impressed by boilerplate letters from senators, judges, CEOs, etc. The same principle applies to academics. A letter from a TA will carry more weight if the TA knows you better than the professor.
- Don't choose someone if you are unsure whether the person will write a strong letter. Don't be afraid to ask if the person is comfortable writing a strong letter.
- Don't feel that you have to choose a professor/TA in your major or from a law-related course. The course subject matter is less important than the writer's knowledge of you.

How to Add a Recommender in Your LSAC Account

STEP 1: Log in to your LSAC account at www.lsac.org.

STEP 2: Click on Letters of Recommendation/Evaluations under Credential Assembly Service.

STEP 3: Click on the blue button labeled Add/Edit My Recommenders/Evaluators.

STEP 4: Click on the blue button labeled Add NEW Recommender/Evaluator.

STEP 5: Click on Recommender Only. Note: Very few schools require Evaluations, and most prefer Letters of Recommendation.

STEP 6: Complete all blanks in the sections labeled Recommender/Evaluator Information and Recommender Contact Information, including ones that are not required but may be relevant (e.g., title, e-mail address).

STEP 7: In the section labeled Letter Information, indicate how many unique letters the Recommender will be providing. In most circumstances, recommenders only provide one, and LSAC sends it to all of the applicant's designated law schools. If your recommender has a personal connection to one of the schools you are applying to, you may wish to ask them to write a separate letter to that school discussing the additional topic of why you would be a strong fit. In that case, you would indicate 2 letters from that recommender.

STEP 8: Add a letter description. In most cases, the description will merely say "All Law Schools." If a letter is personalized for one law school, indicate that here.

Submitting a Law School Letter of Recommendation

Most law schools require applicants to have their recommenders submit letters of recommendation directly to LSAC. In order to do so, you should first add your recommenders in your LSAC account by following the steps indicated in the adjacent text block (How to Add a Recommender in Your LSAC Account). You may then elect to have your recommenders use one of the following two procedures to submit their letters:

Electronic Process

After adding your recommenders to your LSAC account, you can initiate the electronic submission process by clicking the E-mail button to the right of the recommenders' names on the Letters of Recommendation and Evaluations page in your LSAC account. LSAC will then e-mail your recommenders directly with information concerning the process for submitting a letter electronically. Be sure to personally contact your recommenders first in order to determine their willingness to provide a letter.

U.S. Mail Process

For recommenders who may not be comfortable using the electronic process, there is a paper option. To initiate this process, print your recommender's form by clicking the Print button to the right of the recommender's name on the Letters of Recommendation and Evaluations page in your LSAC account. Next, provide that form to the recommender for inclusion with the letter of recommendation. Be sure to provide a stamped envelope for the recommender's convenience.