

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations should reveal the different facets of your abilities. As such, they play a critical role in the application process.

Choosing recommenders

Your recommenders should be people who know you well and who can speak in concrete terms about your accomplishments and abilities. If possible, it is preferable to have a recommender or recommenders who can also address your commitment to the fellowship's area of expertise. Balance your recommendation file to the extent you can, between recommenders with greater name recognition (such as a well-known professor) who tend to write briefly and impersonally and less well-known recommenders (such as tutorial leaders, House tutors, lab post-docs, coaches, and employers) who can write a more in-depth letter. Faculty will occasionally be willing to have a teaching fellow's comments incorporated into a letter on the professor's stationery with a joint signature; alternatively, faculty will often write a summary of the course as a cover letter introducing a teaching fellow's letter replete with details of your performance. If you are receiving a letter exclusively from a teaching fellow, please remind them that letters should always be written on official, dept. stationery. Faculty and tfs who no longer teach at Harvard still write excellent letters that address the context in which they evaluated your work. Avoid peer or family recommendations, but certain fellowships and grants welcome letters from the people who benefited from your assistance and witnessed your direct service dedication.

Asking for recommendations

When asking for recommendations, call your potential recommender and arrange a convenient meeting time. At this meeting, you should bring the following materials:

- Addressed and stamped envelope (Always request an extra copy be sent to your House file)
- Current resume
- Material that you have produced for the recommender through your class or employment
- A copy of application materials for the fellowship, including the selection criteria, a description of the fellowship, and your personal statement (show a draft of the proposal)
- Be very clear about the fellowship deadline. Give your recommenders as much advance notice as possible to write thoughtful letters.

This material will help your recommender write a letter that is tailored to your qualifications and the fellowship's selection criteria.

Multiple recommendations

If you are applying for more than one fellowship, give your recommender the materials for all fellowships when you meet or let him or her know that you may return with another request in the future. Provide your recommender with a list of the fellowships for which you are applying and highlight how they may differ from one another so that your recommender can tailor your letters.

As always, follow the fellowship guidelines carefully. Certain fellowships will only accept confidential letters of recommendation with the recommender's signature across the envelope's seal. Other fellowships expect you to copy the letter several times and include it with your application materials. Still other fellowships, such as the Fulbright and Harvard traveling fellowships, will only receive letters of recommendation that have been submitted by your Fellowships Director or through an elaborate on-line program that requires your registration.

Academic Fellowship and Scholarship Support for undergrad and post-grad plans:

- 1) Course performance (level of difficulty)
- 2) Special research or analytical papers (copy your best with comments)
- 3) Transcript
- 4) Special skills (language, writing, oral presentation).
- 5) Archival, internet, quantitative facility, lab techniques and agility
- 6) Graduate admission scholarship support: ability to follow through on sustained project (thesis: abstract or introductory chapter and conclusion).
- 7) Professional plans: 2 roads diverged— why you chose the one you are pursuing

Travel Fellowship

- 1) Seriousness of purpose: Motivation
- 2) Regional knowledge and sensitivity
- 3) Maturity and judgment (safety concerns)
- 4) Language ability and special skills necessary for success
- 5) Resourcefulness and adaptability
- 6) Ambassadorial qualities (evidence of how well you get along with others)

Public Service and Grants

- 1) Responsibility (demonstrated examples)
- 2) Motivation (tailor the compassion to the clients, issues, context)
- 3) Direct service abilities and understanding of systemic change
- 4) Initiative, independence, and entrepreneurship
- 5) Team work and leadership
- 6) Respectful sensitivity to the needs of others
- 7) Resourcefulness and imagination
- 8) Judgment and maturity (safety concerns)
- 9) Short and long term measurements of success (time-line concrete goals)
- 10) Understanding of financial sustainability and in-kind donations

You want to help recommenders write persuasive letters on your behalf. Depending on the recommendation's purpose, think of specific examples of how you have demonstrated your abilities in the categories above. Assist your recommenders in recalling and identifying how you manifested your distinct talents through anecdotes and other vivid evidence. Remind your recommender how this specific recommendation for academic, travel, public service, or entrepreneurial work is especially compelling for achieving your short term goals and long term academic or professional aspirations.

Examples:

Academic: "Dear Professor XX, I am writing to request a letter for XXX. I am especially interested in pursuing this academic track/ program/study because it builds on the work I first pursued in your course on XXXX. In XXXX, I had the opportunity to explore the role of XX in XX for my first paper topic. For my second paper, I wrote about XX. I have enclosed a copy of the latter paper together with a DRAFT of MY PROPOSAL for this academic opportunity."

Travel: Same basic format—include specifics about how your work in the course or concentration informs the experience you hope to have abroad. Add relevant details, such as how your language or special lab skills will facilitate the project's success. Ex. "When I traveled to Harvard from X."

Public Service and Grants: Offer anecdotes of your readiness to work with a population or set of compelling complex issues based on personal or professional insights you gained in analogous settings requiring responsibility. "I appreciate the safety issues that can arise from my work at..."