Letters of Recommendation

Letters of Recommendation can help you land a prestigious fellowship or get the job you want. But in order to make sure you get a good and thoughtful letter of recommendation, follow these guidelines.

1. **Plan ahead.** It is your responsibility to research scholarship and fellowship opportunities, their eligibility requirements, and most importantly – their application deadlines.

2. Plan on asking someone who knows you and your work quite well over an extended period of time (for example, a professor with whom you have taken several courses).

3. Give the recommender plenty of lead time to write the letter (**3 weeks minimum**!). If you ask for a recommendation at the last minute, you leave the impression that you’re not really all that serious about applying, or that you are completely disorganized and unreliable. Neither are good first impressions and consequently the letter might not be as forceful as it could have been.

4. Provide the recommender with complete details about the scholarship, fellowship or job etc. For example: provide the name of the fellowship, criteria for selection, complete name and address of the person to whom the letter should be sent, and deadline for application.

5. Provide the recommender with copies of both your most recent transcript and resume.

6. It is perfectly legitimate and helpful to provide the recommender with information which you believe might be beneficial to your application, such as a narrative account of certain experiences (e.g. internships or volunteer work) relevant to the particular fellowship or job for which you are applying.
Asking for a Recommendation via Email

The advantages of email are well-known. But the disadvantages are perhaps not as well-known nor appreciated. A badly written email message will certainly leave a bad impression. When writing to a professor (or someone you do not know), always look at your email message as a formal letter.

**BAD:** This is an example of a badly written email message:

From: ihateschool@aol.com
Date: 1/27/02
To: 12345@wayne.edu
Subject:

hey,

**GOOD:** Below is an example of how the message should have been written:

From: John Doe <johndoe@aol.com>
Date: 1/24/013
To: Prof. Mark Ferguson <12345@wayne.edu>
Subject: Request for Letter of Recommendation

Dear Professor Ferguson,

I was a student in your German 2710 course (Fall 2012) and am applying for a Fulbright Fellowship. I was wondering if you would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me. The application deadline is March 15, 2013. If you would be willing to write a recommendation, I would gladly send you the forms required by the Fulbright Commission, as well as a copy of my most recent transcript and cv. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, and many thanks in advance.

Sincerely,

John Doe

1234 Main St
Main City, ME 12345
Tel. (123) 123-4567