

Dr. Methe's Policy on Letters of Recommendation for Students

If you have completed one of my classes, **completed all tests and assignments with a passing grade, and received a final grade of a B or above**, I will write you a recommendation. If you do not meet these criteria, it is likely that I would (and should) have reservations recommending you based on the work that you've completed. There are always exceptions, however.

Before you ask me for a recommendation, take some time to reflect on exactly why you are asking me and considering if I'm the right person to recommend you. Keep in mind that recommendations are typically made by someone who knows you and therefore **believes in your ability** to complete work that is assigned to you.

The **most important issue** that I consider in writing a letter of recommendation is **whether or not you are well matched to the position** that is requiring a letter. If you are well-matched, then your job in requesting a letter of recommendation from me revolves around **demonstrating to me that you are well matched**. The **second most important issue** is how well I know you.

There are two very common scenarios regarding my knowledge of you and your work:

1. First, if I know you very well, you don't have to take the time to convince me that you are well matched. If **you are a student that I know very well** (one of my teaching, graduate, research assistants or a graduate student, or a student who frequently meets with me during office hours), I do not require anything other than **ample time** (typically 2-3 weeks advance notice at the earliest), a **specific deadline**, and **contact information** for the person to whom the letter is addressed. **I will construct the letter in its entirety**. As a courtesy to me, even though I know you well, I will ask you to briefly outline your qualifications for the position and your own perception of your strengths and weaknesses.

2. Second, if **you are a student that I do not know very well**, I will need to re-learn about you. Your major objective here is to remind me who you are, when you took my class, the grade you received, and something you learned. Students who I don't know very well may have taken a class of mine more than a year ago or never actually met me during office hours one-to-one (many students simply take my classes and perhaps speak with me after or before class a few times or answer some questions in class, etc.). Also, you may have taken a class with me of over 30 students. Please do not assume that I remember you. If I am teaching undergraduate classes, there are scenarios where I am teaching over 400 students per year.

Under the following conditions (please read carefully the issues on the next page), I will be happy to write you a letter of recommendation:

- Take the necessary time to **remind me** of the exact course you took, the semester and institution where you took the course, the grade you received (I will cross-reference my records), and something you learned from the course and perhaps applied to your life.
- Second, if it is a letter you are requiring from me (instead of a checklist or a brief paragraph), **I require that you write your own letter of recommendation for the position**, outlining your qualification for the position, your strengths and leadership skills, your interest in the position, how you will contribute to the position, and how you are using this position to further your personal and professional growth. In my opinion, if you know your own strengths, then this translates well for you into the job to which I am recommending you.
- Third, I require that you **take the time** to ensure that all correspondence to me is thoughtful, clear, succinct, and very well written. In my opinion, the time you put into your correspondence indicates to me that you care about the position, my time, your time, and are thoughtful enough to do it right.
- Fourth, I require that you give me **no less than two weeks** to complete the letter and give me the **exact date** this letter is due. Please adhere to this. I will very rarely complete a letter or a reference in less than two weeks. Keep in mind that although I frequently check my email, I can be away for periods of up to 5 days when I may not check my email (weekends, conventions, travel, or school breaks). **Sometimes, there are situations when you may have just learned about a position** and are under this timeline. If you keep my overall guidelines in mind, there are many things you can do to ensure that you'll get a letter from me even in under a week.
- READ THIS ONE CAREFULLY: I require that you furnish me with **every piece of information I need to write the letter**. Sometimes, letters do not need to be written, I may simply need to fill in a checklist or something like this. Whether or not it's a letter, please give me an overview in your words of exactly what you need me to do. This typically includes (a) sending me a copy of the position announcement, (b) the address and name of the person to whom the letter is addressed, (c) any special circumstances. Giving me ample time tells me not only that you are prepared for the position, but that you **respect my time as well**. Generally, I agree with the idea that poor planning on the part of someone who asks me for a favor should not result in my "emergency" support. It is very frustrating for me to receive a request for a recommendation that requires me to do lots of detective work and short-notice travel (e.g., please deliver this letter to this strange building across campus tomorrow by noon).