

Instructions for
REQUESTS FOR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION
FROM
BOB DENNIS

I write over 100 letters of recommendation each year. I am happy to do this because it is a very important part of my job and it has a major impact on the future careers of many people, but the sheer volume of letters I have to write requires that I apply very strict guidelines to this process.

Please follow these instructions VERY CAREFULLY if you would like me to write a letter of recommendation for you. If you just drop by my office I may not be able to give you complete instructions verbally, so please follow the instructions below.

If you follow these instructions carefully it is likely that I can turn around your request in a day or two. If you leave something out, it is likely that there will be a long delay and your materials will end up on my “problems to be solved when I have a few free microseconds” pile, which has a backlog of 4 - 7 months before I even have a chance to leaf through the stuff.

Specific Instructions:

Paper letters for job applications, academic fellowships, etc.:
(generally this will only apply to people with an M.D. or Ph.D. who have worked in my laboratory or for whom I served as a committee member)

-1- Give me one sentence describing what you are applying for. Tell me the institution(s) and the programs or degrees you are applying for. Examples:

Training fellowship in pediatric plastic surgery at U of Toronto.
Professorship (tenure track) at the University of Wisconsin in the department of Chemical Engineering

-2- Give me no more than 1 short paragraph telling me what specific aspects of your work with me that you would like me to elaborate on in the letter (examples: developed vascular tissue in culture, developed and co-instructed a new course in XXX, etc...), and a very brief description of your specific contribution to this work that you think I should emphasize.

-3- Give me a few hints about what they are looking for in the program you are applying to: leadership skills, ability to speak Latin, etc...

- 4- Give me the name and address of the person or organization to whom I should send the completed letter.
- 5- Give me all of this information by e-mail. Please put all of the information into a single e-mail message.
- 6- I will print the letter out on official University of Michigan water-marked letterhead and as a bonus, I will also provide an official University envelope and a stamp. Generally this will not be the case for most other types of letters that I will write (see below).

For written letters (on paper), for student applications to universities, industrial jobs, etc.:

- 1- Give me one sentence describing what you are applying for. Tell me the institution(s) and the programs or degrees you are applying for. Examples:
 - Master's Degree in Biomedical Engineering at Stanford
 - PhD in Animal Husbandry at Michigan State
 - Medical Scientist Program at Harvard-MIT (called the HST program)
 - SGUS program in Mechanical (B.S.E.) and Biomedical (M.S.) Eng at U of M
- 2- Give me no more than 2 sentences reminding me what you did when you worked with me (examples: ME450 project XXXX, ME490 project YYY), and a very brief description of your specific contribution.
- 3- Tell me when the recommendation is due.
- 4- Fill out all of the necessary forms for each letter (each university has one)
- 5- Be sure to check and sign the box that says "I hereby WAIVE my right of access to the information recorded below". If you do not waive your rights to read the letter and forms, then no one will fill them out honestly and no one will believe what is said. The letters and forms essentially become useless if they are not confidential.
- 6- Provide a stamped addressed envelope for each letter. You should do this for each and every letter you want me to send.
- 7- If you just want me to give you a letter that you will send in later with a larger package (generally not a good idea, people like the letters to come directly from the writer, not handled by the applicant), then also provide an envelope with your name on it in pencil. If you want the letter mailed to you, you also need to provide a self-addressed, stamped envelope that will contain a smaller SEALED envelope with my letter in it. The smaller envelope must also be addressed and stamped. If you send in an unsealed letter to anyone, it is useless. I will write

the letter, put it in the smaller envelope, seal it, write my name across the seal, and put it in the larger envelope to send to you. Alternatively you can pick it up by arrangement. Generally I do NOT recommend this approach. Fraud in academic applications runs at about 10% to 20%, so people are becoming increasingly wary of falsified information, including letters of recommendation. Generally, the very best thing to do is do your homework ahead of time, get all the stuff filled out properly, provide stamped and addressed envelopes directly to the recipient, and get all of the letters and forms mailed DIRECTLY to the institution you are applying to. Follow their instructions carefully as well.

-8- Paperclip each set of forms & envelopes together for each letter of recommendation. This will allow me to systematically fill out each one and keep everything in order.

Please include all of the information in a single package. You can slip this under my office door any time and I will take care of it promptly.

For web-based letters of recommendation (NSF Fastlane, etc.):

-1- Give me one sentence describing what you are applying for (program, fellowship, etc...).

-2- Give me no more than 2 sentences reminding me what you did when you worked with me (examples: ME450 project XXXX, ME490 project YYY), and a very brief description of your specific contribution.

-3- Tell me when the recommendation is due.

Please include all of the information in a single e-mail.

Then, give me very detailed instructions on how to access and fill out the necessary web-based forms. An example of a very good request follows:

I am applying to another NSF program that would allow me to gain research experience in <a foreign country> next summer: the East Asia and Pacific Summer Institutes for Graduate Students. As a reminder, I worked with you on Project YYY for ME490 in Fall 2002. Could you please submit a reference for this application?

- 1.) Access fastlane website: www.fastlane.nsf.gov
- 2.) Click on "Postdoctoral Fellowships and Other Programs"
- 3.) Click "Go" next to I am a Letter of reference writer
- 4.) Enter your lastname, temp proposal number xxxxxxxx, and your password bobxxx
- 5.) Follow steps 1 through 4

*** Deadline of December 10, 2004