

# *Letters of Recommendation: What do you need to be aware of and what should they contain?*

**Letters of recommendation from teachers are common in other countries and are now gaining importance here too. They can be especially useful if you are applying for a Masters, a scholarship place or even your first graduate job. Submitting a recommendation letter may be a requirement for some application processes.**

## **Recommendation letters vs. References**

Letters of recommendation are mostly intended for one specific recipient and put emphasis on future jobs. They recommend the employee or student for a specific position.

References on the other hand are much more general and are not intended for any specific recipient. The focus here is more on tasks/jobs performed up to date and previously acquired skills and qualifications.

## **Who writes a letter of recommendation?**

A professor writes a letter of recommendation in a university. Most professors require attendance at their lectures and a private discussion before they will write you a recommendation letter.



It is of course even better if you had been working within the corresponding professorship and the professor actually knows you personally. This makes writing the letter of recommendation a lot easier and it will be more personal to you.

## **What belongs in a letter of recommendation?**

The purpose of the letter of recommendation is that the person making a decision about your application can get to know you better. The personal judgement and getting to know you well is critical here. Foundations in particular give their places to students, who have been socially/politically engaged alongside their studies or are interested in and advocate for corresponding topics. In addition, extra-curricular activities at the university, in companies or research institutions are often requirements for a grant.



Your personal aptitude should be clearly recognisable here. It is also necessary to mention which position the person writing the letter has and how they got to know you.

A letter of recommendation is of course there to convey a positive and authentic impression of the person for whom it was written. They are only believable however, if specific tasks, successes and qualities are praised. Too much praise could soon appear to be an exaggeration. It should definitely be clear why the person writing the letter of recommendation has grounds to recommend you.

### What should you watch out for? Formal and content composition

Firstly, there are no legal regulations or standards. However, there are a few things, of which the author should be aware.

- The letter of recommendation should be written by someone in a teaching role or by someone in authority. Letters from colleagues of equal rank, for example, are considered untrustworthy.
- It should contain meaningful evidence of your tasks, way of working, personality and work fields.
- The widely known 'reference differing codes' should not be used in a letter of recommendation. The focus should be on the strengths of the person to be recommended, as positive as possible and showing appreciation for the person.

### Content Structuring

- Header (Subject)
- Name of the person to be recommended
- Time frame during which the author was acquainted with the person to be recommended, worked with them or in what context they have observed them.
- Type of relationship, connection or contact



- Significant tasks and fields of work of the person to be recommended including successes and work results.
- Emphatic recommendation
- Typical character traits (if the person writing the letter knows you personally)

### Optional

- Statements of (your) potential/ wishing well for your future career
- Acknowledgements
- Statement of satisfaction

### Formatting (see example)

- Max. 1 A4 sheet
- 1st person
- Address of person writing the reference
- Maximum 3 references per application



### Tips: How do you get a letter of recommendation at the university?

#### 1. Timing

- Write an email or visit the professor during their office hours.
- Give them enough time to write you the letter. Plan at least 4 weeks in advance.

#### 2. What do you need?

- What exactly is the professor supposed to assess? Your personal and professional suitability?

#### 3. Documents

- Bring all the necessary documents with you unprompted. Forms, references from employers and your CV all count here.

#### 4. Example email to a professor

- Dear Professor Bloggs,

As I am sure you will certainly remember, you assisted me with my Bachelor dissertation on the international sanctions on Zimbabwe. Now I wish to apply for a Masters in Peace and Conflict Research at XY University and would be very grateful, if you would write a letter of recommendation for me. The deadline for handing it in is dd.mm.yyyy. I am happy to bring you all the necessary documents. I would be very happy to speak with you in person about the details, if you have the time.

#### Sources and additional links

<https://www.absolventa.de/karriereguide/optionale-bewerbungsunterlagen/empfehlungsschreiben>

<https://karrierebibel.de/empfehlungsschreiben/>

**Do you still have questions?**

**We are happy to provide personal advice:**

**<http://www.uni-due.de/abz/career.php>**

**Good luck with your application!**