



A2 ACHIEVE GUIDE TO REQUESTING COLLEGE RECOMMENDATIONS

HOW TO ASK FOR A STRONG COLLEGE RECOMMENDATION

A strong recommendation letter can add something to your application that grades, test scores, activities, and essays cannot: **another person's perspective on who you are.**

The best recommendation letters do more than say that you earned a good grade or were a good student. They help an admissions reader understand how you think, how you work, how you treat other people, how you respond to challenges, and what you may contribute to a college community.

Your job is not to tell your recommender what to write. Your job is to:

- Choose the right person.
- Ask respectfully and early.
- Give that person enough information to write a detailed letter.
- Make the process easy.
- Follow up appropriately.
- Say thank you.

STEP ONE: KNOW WHAT YOUR COLLEGES REQUIRE

Before asking anyone for a recommendation, review the requirements for each college on your list.

Colleges may ask for:

- A school counselor recommendation
- One teacher recommendation
- Two teacher recommendations
- An optional additional recommendation
- No recommendation letters at all

Do not request extra recommendations simply because you can. **More is not always better.**

An additional recommendation should add a perspective that the rest of your application does not already provide. For example, an additional recommender might be:

- A coach
- An employer
- A research mentor
- A community leader
- A music or theatre director
- A volunteer supervisor
- A religious leader
- A professor from a dual enrollment course

Only use an additional recommendation when the college accepts one and the person can genuinely add something meaningful.

STEP TWO: CHOOSE THE RIGHT RECOMMENDER

Do not automatically choose the teacher whose class gave you the highest grade. Choose someone who **knows you well enough to write about you as a person and student.**

Strong recommenders may be able to speak about:

- Your intellectual curiosity
- Your improvement
- Your work ethic
- Your character
- Your leadership
- Your willingness to ask questions
- Your persistence
- Your contribution to class
- Your creativity
- Your ability to work with others
- Your maturity
- Your kindness
- Your resilience
- Your interest in a particular subject

A teacher who watched you struggle, improve, and eventually succeed may sometimes write a stronger letter than a teacher whose class came easily to you.

Ask yourself: **Could this person tell a story about me?** If the answer is yes that is usually a good sign.

STEP THREE: ASK EARLY

Give your recommender as much time as possible. Whenever possible, ask **several weeks before your first application deadline.** Teachers and counselors may be writing letters for many students at the same time. Do not wait until three days before a deadline and expect someone else to solve an emergency that could have been avoided. When you ask, give the recommender your **earliest college deadline**, not the deadline for only one school.

Example:

My first application deadline is October 15.

That immediately tells the recommender when the letter is actually needed.

STEP FOUR: ASK, DO NOT ASSUME

Whenever possible, ask a teacher in person first. You are asking someone to spend time advocating for you. Treat that as a meaningful request.

A good question is: **“Would you feel comfortable writing me a strong college recommendation?”**

The word **strong** matters. You are giving the teacher an opportunity to decline if they do not believe they can write a genuinely supportive letter. That is better than receiving a weak recommendation.

TEMPLATE: ASKING A TEACHER IN PERSON

“Mr./Ms. _____, I’m starting my college applications, and I wanted to ask if you would feel comfortable writing me a strong recommendation letter. I really enjoyed your _____ class, and I feel like you got to know me as a student. My first application deadline is _____. I can send you my resume and some information about my colleges and goals if that would be helpful.”

TEMPLATE: EMAIL REQUEST TO A TEACHER

Subject: College Recommendation Request

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

I hope you are doing well. I am beginning my college applications and wanted to ask if you would feel comfortable writing me a strong letter of recommendation.

I especially enjoyed your _____ class because _____. I feel that you had an opportunity to see my _____, and I would be grateful if you would be willing to share your perspective with the colleges I am applying to.

My earliest application deadline is _____.

I would be happy to provide my resume, college list, intended major, activities, or any additional information that would help you write the letter.

Thank you for considering this. I know recommendation letters require additional time and effort, and I really appreciate it.

Sincerely,

TEMPLATE: REQUESTING A COUNSELOR RECOMMENDATION

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

I am preparing my college applications and wanted to make sure I complete everything you need from me for my counselor recommendation.

My earliest college application deadline is _____.

I am applying to:

- _____
- _____
- _____

My current intended major or academic interest is _____.

I am happy to provide my resume, activities list, college list, application deadlines, or any additional information that would be helpful.

Please let me know if there is a school specific form, questionnaire, brag sheet, or other information you would like me to complete.

Thank you very much for your help throughout this process.

Sincerely,

TEMPLATE: REQUESTING A RECOMMENDATION FROM A COACH, EMPLOYER, MENTOR, OR COMMUNITY LEADER

Dear _____,

I am currently working on my college applications and wanted to ask if you would feel comfortable writing me a strong letter of recommendation.

Because you have worked with me through _____, I believe you have seen a side of me that may not be as visible elsewhere in my application, particularly my _____.

My earliest application deadline is _____.

If you are willing, I would be happy to send you my resume, college list, intended major, and additional information about my goals.

Thank you for considering this. I am very grateful for the time you have invested in me and for your willingness to support me.

Sincerely,

STEP FIVE: GIVE YOUR RECOMMENDER A RECOMMENDATION PACKET

Once someone agrees to write your recommendation, make their job easier. Do not simply say “Thanks!” and disappear. Give them useful information. Your recommendation packet may include:

Your Resume

Provide the strongest and most current version of your academic resume.

1. Your College List

Include:

- College name
- Application deadline
- Application type if relevant
- Whether the recommendation is required or optional

2. Your Intended Major or Career Interest

You do not need to have your entire life figured out. Simply provide your current direction.

Examples:

- Biology / Pre Medicine
- Mechanical Engineering
- Journalism
- Architecture
- Business
- Nursing
- Psychology
- Undecided with interests in _____

3. A Short Student Profile

Give the recommender a few reminders about experiences they may have seen firsthand. This is especially helpful for teachers who have taught hundreds of students.

STUDENT RECOMMENDATION PROFILE TEMPLATE

Student Name:

Recommender:

Earliest Application Deadline:

Intended Major or Academic Area:

Possible Career Interests:

Why I Am Asking You

I chose to ask you for a recommendation because:

What I Remember Most About Your Class, Team, Organization, or Workplace

One experience that stands out to me is:

Something I Am Proud of From My Time With You:

A Challenge I Faced or Something I Improved:

Qualities I Hope You Saw in Me:

An Example That Demonstrates One of Those Qualities:

What I Hope to Study or Explore in College:

Something You May Not Know About Me

This could include an activity, job, family responsibility, accomplishment, interest, or experience that provides additional context.

DO NOT WRITE THE RECOMMENDATION FOR THEM

There is an important difference between giving a recommender helpful information and trying to control the letter.

Do not send someone a list that says, **“Please say that I am hardworking, intelligent, responsible, kind, and a leader.”** Instead, give them examples.

Rather than: **Tell them I am persistent.** Give the recommender the story: **I struggled on our first calculus exam, started coming to tutoring every Tuesday, changed how I studied, and earned an A on the next two exams.**

Specific examples give recommenders something they can actually write about.

STEP SIX: USE THE COMMON APP CORRECTLY

If you are applying through Common App, you will generally invite your recommenders electronically. You will need accurate information, including your recommender's:

- Full name
- Position or title
- School or organization
- Email address

Make sure you enter the correct email address. Do not send multiple invitations to different email addresses for the same person unless you have confirmed that is necessary.

Once a recommender submits a Common App recommendation, it can generally be assigned to multiple colleges that accept that type of recommendation. You do not need the teacher to rewrite the letter for every school.

FERPA WAIVER

During the Common App recommendation process, you may be asked whether you waive your right to review recommendation letters. Students typically **waive their right to view recommendation letters**. A confidential recommendation generally carries more credibility because the recommender knows the student will not be reviewing the letter. If you have questions about the FERPA section before submitting it, stop and ask your counselor or A2 Achieve.

STEP SEVEN: FOLLOW UP APPROPRIATELY

Teachers and counselors are busy. A reminder is appropriate. Constant checking is not. If the deadline is approaching and the recommendation still appears incomplete, send a polite reminder.

TEMPLATE: POLITE RECOMMENDATION REMINDER

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,
I wanted to send a quick reminder that my first college application deadline is _____.
Thank you again for agreeing to write my recommendation. I really appreciate your time and support.
Please let me know if there is any additional information I can provide.
Thank you,

TEMPLATE: DEADLINE IS ONE WEEK AWAY

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,
I wanted to check in because my _____ application deadline is one week away on _____.
I know this is a very busy time of year, and I sincerely appreciate you writing a recommendation for me.
Please let me know if there is anything else you need from me.
Thank you again,

WHAT NOT TO SEND

Avoid messages like: **“Did you do my letter yet?”** or **“Common App says you haven’t submitted.”** Or **“I need this ASAP.”** Or **“Reminder!!! My application is due!!!”** Your recommender is doing you a favor. Your communication should reflect that.

STEP EIGHT: SAY THANK YOU

Always thank your recommender. A handwritten note is especially thoughtful, but an email is still appropriate. Let them know that you recognize the time they spent supporting you.

THANK YOU TEMPLATE

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

Thank you so much for taking the time to write a recommendation for my college applications.

I really appreciate your support and everything I learned from you during _____.

I know recommendation letters require extra time outside of your normal responsibilities, and I am very grateful that you were willing to help me.

Thank you again,

AFTER YOU RECEIVE YOUR COLLEGE DECISIONS

Go back and tell the people who supported you. Your teachers and counselors often wonder what happened after they submitted the recommendation. You can send a simple update.

COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE UPDATE TEMPLATE

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

I wanted to share some good news with you. I was accepted to _____!

Thank you again for supporting me during the application process and for writing my recommendation.

I really appreciate the role you played in helping me reach this point.

Thank you,

COLLEGE DECISION UPDATE TEMPLATE

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

I wanted to give you an update now that I have completed my college decision process.

I have decided to attend _____ this fall and plan to study _____.

Thank you again for writing my recommendation and for supporting me throughout high school. I am very grateful for your help.

Sincerely,

A2 ACHIEVE RECOMMENDATION REQUEST CHECKLIST

Before requesting a recommendation:

- ☐ Review the recommendation requirements for each college.
- ☐ Identify your earliest application deadline.
- ☐ Choose a recommender who genuinely knows you.
- ☐ Ask whether they are comfortable writing a **strong** recommendation.
- ☐ Ask early.

After they agree:

- ☐ Send your academic resume.
- ☐ Send your college list.
- ☐ Provide your intended major or academic interests.
- ☐ Complete any school counselor or teacher recommendation questionnaire.
- ☐ Send your Student Recommendation Profile if helpful.
- ☐ Enter the recommender correctly in Common App or the applicable college portal.
- ☐ Complete the FERPA section.

Before the deadline:

- ☐ Check that the recommendation has been requested correctly.
- ☐ Send one polite reminder if necessary.
- ☐ Never pressure or repeatedly message your recommender.

After submission:

- ☐ Send a thank you.
- ☐ Update your recommender when you receive major admissions decisions.
- ☐ Let them know where you ultimately decide to attend.

FINAL A2 ACHIEVE ADVICE

The best recommendation letters usually come from relationships you built **before you ever needed a recommendation.**

Be the student who participates. Ask thoughtful questions. Show up. Follow through. Treat people well. Respond to feedback. Help other students. Take responsibility when something does not go well. Allow your teachers, counselors, coaches, employers, and mentors to see who you are over time.

Then, when college application season arrives, they have something meaningful to say.

A recommendation should reinforce the person already visible throughout your application. Your goal is not to collect impressive names. Your goal is to choose people who can say: **“I know this student, and here is why I believe they will make a difference wherever they go next.”**