Applying for an Academic Position: Letters of Recommendation

When applying for academic jobs, you'll be asked to provide several letters of recommendation from faculty who can attest to your promise as a scholar. Depending upon the position you're applying for, you may be asked to supply anywhere from three to five letters. Job search committees will tell you that well-written letters of recommendation that speak, with a reasonable amount of detail, about a candidate's qualifications are crucial to securing interviews and job offers.

**HOW TO GET LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

Aside from the obvious – being a stellar student with a first-rate dissertation and several conference papers and journal articles under your belt – there are many things you can do to ensure that you get quality letters of recommendation.

- Consider having several professors and colleagues write letters for you. Select referees who can speak to your different abilities, as teacher, scholar, and researcher. Your advisor and members of your committee may be best positioned to comment on the quality of your research and your potential as a scholar. A professor you have taught for and who has observed your teaching may be best qualified to write about your teaching abilities.
- Above all, it’s important to communicate with the people who will be writing letters of recommendation for you. Let them know what kinds of jobs you’re applying for, what your qualifications and career goals are, and why you’ve selected them to write a letter. (If there’s one ability you’d like them to focus on, such as teaching or lab work, be sure to explain that to them.)
- Be organized enough to give your referees ample time to complete their letters before the application deadline. This means anticipating things like holidays and semester breaks. If you’ll be going on the market in the fall semester, it’s often best to meet with your letter writers the spring before.
- Be sure to send thank you notes to those who take the time to write letters of recommendation for you.

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

- Berkeley’s Career Center outlines what makes a good letter of recommendation, addresses how to get a good letter, who to ask, and other frequently-asked questions: [https://career.berkeley.edu/Phds/PhDletters.stm](https://career.berkeley.edu/Phds/PhDletters.stm)