

Ten Key Items for Recommendation-Askers
David Chioni Moore, International Studies, Macalester College, January 2005
PDF version for use as a checklist

As we've discussed personally, I'll be very glad to write a recommendation for you. Since I get this request often, I've written up these brief guidelines, useful not only for me but for all your contacts with recommenders. Share it with friends as well.

Main message: *make everything as easy for your recommenders as possible. A happy recommender writes the most positive letters!*

Please note that full-scale applications, such as to a half-dozen graduate schools at once, require a high degree of organization. Recommendations for smaller items such as summer internships are less complex and can often be handled in simple ways such as email.

May I suggest that you print out this page for use as a checklist?

- 1. Be timely.** Supply all necessary forms and/or e-prompts several weeks in advance of any/all deadlines.
- 2. Do the work for me.** If there are forms, either print or online, fill out as much of them as you can, in plain, neat, block, black-ink handwriting. That would include the following info usually asked for: David Chioni Moore, PhD. Associate Professor, International Studies and English. Macalester College. St. Paul, MN 55105. Email mooredc@macalester.edu. Telephone 651-696-6242. Fax 651-696-6750.
- 3. For forms, I'll handle substance.** I'll answer any substantive questions such as "how long and in what capacity have you known the applicant?"
- 4. Envelopes!** If any envelopes are needed, supply them, stamped, addressed and standard size. Write my return address in the upper left: D.C. Moore, International Studies / Macalester College / St. Paul, MN 55105. Again, use your neatest, plainest handwriting. Do the work for me.
- 5. Be neat.** If you are applying to several schools or programs, keep things well-organized, with paperclips, post-its, etc. Please provide a chart-like cover-note listing all the schools, degrees, their deadlines, e- or print forms etc.
- 6. Give me "spin."** So I can appropriately inflect my recommendation, supply me with an early draft of your personal statement. It is OK if this is sketchy: after all, it's a draft!
- 7. Update me.** If it's been a while since we've been in good contact, send me a copy of your resume and a brief writeup as to what you've been doing since last we were in good touch. Email me a recent photo as well – it's nice to keep touch!
- 8. Sign the waiver.** For forms, I ask that you sign any waiver, relinquishing your right to see these recommendations later. I ask for two reasons. First, it gives readers more confidence in the document. Second, I'll send you a copy of anything I write about you if you ask.
- 9. Know the standard practice.** Recommenders normally write one full recommendation letter on professional letterhead. Then, except for very short questions (such as "in what percentile would you rank this candidate?"), we write "see attached" on the form and then attach our letter. This is true both for print and web-based recommendations; web-based recs typically ask recommenders to upload their basic letter and then check some boxes.
- 10. Give me a detailed report of results.** Once you hear from your schools or programs, contact me and tell me how you fared. I have two reasons for this. The first is that I am thrilled to hear good news and glad to commiserate where things do not work out. The second is that getting detailed feedback of my students' "win-loss" experiences helps me enormously in advising successive rounds of students as to where applications make sense. Your report is a service to many Mac alums.

So: get to writing, and all best luck!