

Ten Key Items for Recommendation-Askers

David Chioni Moore, International Studies,
Macalester College, May 2010

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 your contacts with *all* your recommenders. Please share this list with friends as well.

Main message: make everything as **easy** for your recommenders as possible. A happy recommender writes the most positive letters, and gets them out in the most timely fashion!

Please note that a full-scale application campaign, such as to 4-8 graduate schools at once, requires a high degree of organization – including for your recommendations. Recommendations for smaller items such as summer internships are less complex and can often be handled in simple ways such as direct email.

If it would be helpful, [click here for a formatted-for-print PDF version of this page.](#)

1. Be timely. Make your request well before the first deadline you face, and then supply all necessary forms and/or e-prompts several weeks in advance. If you can, cluster all information and requests in a single batch.

2. Do the work for me. If there are forms, either print or online, fill out as much of them as you can. (For paper forms, write in plain, neat, block, black-ink.) That would include the following info usually asked for: David Chioni Moore, PhD. Associate Professor & Chair, International Studies and English. Macalester College. St. Paul, MN 55105 USA. Email mooredc@macalester.edu. Telephone USA 651-696-6242.

3. For forms, I'll handle substance. You fill in the basic info, and I'll answer any substantive questions such as "how long and in what capacity have you known the applicant?"

4. Envelopes. If envelopes are needed for print forms, as a cordial gesture of convenience, 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.

5. Be organized and neat. If you are applying to several schools or programs, keep things well-organized. Print materials should be sent to me in a bunch with paperclips, post-its, etc. Whether for print or online recs, provide all recommenders with a chart-like cover-note listing all the schools, degrees, their deadlines, submission methods, etc.

6. Give me "spin." So I can appropriately inflect my recommendation, supply me with an early draft of your personal statement. If you were all about the environment here at Mac, but your applications three years later are about human rights, I should know this. Don't delay: it's OK if your draft P.S. is sketchy: after all, it's a draft!

7. Update me. If it's been a while since we've been in good contact, email me 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 will normally write you one full recommendation letter for any given class of schools: for example, all law schools, all MIA programs, all medical schools, etc. We answer the short questions we are asked directly (such as "in what percentile would you rank this candidate?"), but the bulk of our views are contained in the general letter. We can, given time, customize this for a specific target school (or, for example, fellowship) in exceptional circumstances.

10. Give me a detailed report of results. Once you hear from your schools or programs, tell me how you fared, school-by-school. 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. Your report to me will serve many Mac alums to follow.

So: get to writing, and all best luck!