

Understanding the recommendation process



Many programs ask you to include letters of recommendation with your application. These letters are submitted by recommenders. A recommender's input helps clarify and support the information you share in your application.

Who are recommenders?

Recommenders are people who have worked with and supported you in your life. They can be individuals from your academic history, like a professor. They can also be people who worked with you in your community, such as coaches or employers.

There are four recommender types in the Common App: personal, professional, academic, and high school official.

Personal

A personal recommender provides information about you as an individual outside of a professional or academic setting. Examples might include a former or current coach, mentor, community member, or friend.

Professional

A professional recommender can share information about you within a workplace setting. Such a recommender might be a former or current manager, professional mentor, and/or colleague.

Academic

An academic recommender should be able to provide information about you as a student. Academic recommenders could be a former or current professor, academic advisor, or faculty sponsor.

High school official

A high school official should have direct access to your final high school transcript and high school record. High school officials include a former high school guidance counselor or college counselor.

High school officials are asked to upload your final high school transcript. They do not, however, submit letters of recommendation on your behalf.



Recommendation requirements

Each program can determine their own recommendation requirements. They can choose the number and type of recommenders they accept. You can see each program's requirements within your application.

If a program allows recommendations to be added, but doesn't require them, you don't have to invite any. It's best to assign a recommender only if you think their recommendation will support your application.

Asking for a letter of recommendation

Before inviting a recommender in your application, it's important to ask if they are willing to provide a recommendation first. It's best to ask in person, but an email is ok too. When asking, be respectful of your recommenders' time. You should ask for a letter of recommendation at least three weeks in advance of a deadline. The more advance notice you give, the more time they have to craft a well-written letter.

When you are ready to send your invitations, go to the Program Materials section. You can invite recommenders in a program's Recommendations tab. For more details about this process, check out the application guide on commonapp.org.

Supporting your recommenders

To help your recommender with the process, it's a good idea to share some information about yourself they can reference. For example, a copy of your current resume or written examples of experiences you have had with them (ex. "I served as your lab assistant in 2007, where work contributed to 3 of your published articles.").

Similarly, if there is something specific about a program that you'd like your recommender to highlight, let them know. For example, "since the school I am applying to values citizenship, please provide examples of the civic projects you and I worked on together."

It's also a good idea to stay in contact with your recommenders. Help keep them updated on your application deadlines and other important information. You can also track the status of your recommendations within your application.

Don't forget to thank your recommenders for writing those letters! A thank you note goes a long way.