



## Seattle Pacific University

Department of Family & Consumer Sciences

Didactic Program in Dietetics

### *How to Ask for Recommendations, Nicely*

Writing letters of recommendation is an important part of a professor's job, and we're honored to do it. But it's also a chore – a happy chore, but a chore nonetheless – so you need to be clear, polite, thorough, detailed, and respectful of your professor's time. Because your professors take the writing of recommendation letters very seriously, they expect you to do the same. Recommendations reflect not just the quality of the student, but also the integrity of the professor and ultimately the quality of your program and university. Here's how to help.

1. **Choose a faculty member who knows you well**, preferably in a variety of contexts. Internship directors and graduate schools read hundreds of reference letters, most of which offer generic praise. Specific reference letters are more likely to get noticed and appreciated. The more a professor knows about you, the more specific the letter will be. This means that you need to develop an intellectual and personal relationship with your professor that extends over several quarters or years.
2. **Ask for a recommendation – don't tell.** A formal meeting might be better than a call or e-mail. In this meeting you can share why you have chosen this professor. Give her time to consider your request. If your professor is reluctant or unable to write you a letter, don't push it. If what you are requesting is to put your professor as a reference on a resume or form, or to have a check-list form completed, you do not need to have a meeting; simply send a detailed e-mail or leave a voice mail message.
3. **Ask early.** Make an appointment to discuss the dietetic internship recommendation *no later than the end of final exam week during autumn quarter*. For any other recommendation (e.g. graduate school), make an appointment *no later than 60 days* before it is due. Professors have very tight schedules and need ample time to craft a thoughtful and distinctive letter. Letters requested later will be completed only after all letters requested on time have been written and may be less favorable than they would have been if requested on time. In addition, every professor reserves the right to refuse to write the recommendation if the request comes in too late.
4. **E-mail the details.** Once you've got the green light, send your professor *no later than January 1* the information listed below in a *single Word document* (no need to provide a hard copy). Make sure to submit information for all programs you are applying to in a single document. Let your professor know if the letter(s) will need to be mailed out directly to the internship or graduate program (because they require this or because you are an alum and live away from campus) or returned to you in a signed and sealed envelope, for you to mail out together with your application. Also remember that the more professors know about you and your aspirations, the more specific they can be about your talents and motivation. Please do not use any formatting, such as tabs or bullets, but simply start each response to the points below on a new line using 11-pt Calibri font.

Your **name**, SPU student **ID**, your **total SPU GPA**, and your **DPD GPA**.

List of **all the courses you have taken from this professor**, the quarter you took each & the grade received.

List of your perceived personal **strengths** and at least one example of a situation or experience that has manifested one of these strengths, as well as how you perceive these strengths would benefit you in your internship and future career.

List of your perceived **weaknesses/areas of growth** and how these might affect you in the future.

Statement about what **aspect of your work or character** you would like this particular professor to focus on or highlight in their letter (e.g. work in a specific class, performance on a certain paper or project, advising experience, certain qualities that the particular professor has observed, etc.) That way the admissions committee will get a more well-rounded idea of what you're bringing to the table.

- List of the **internships for which you are requesting letters** of recommendation, including the following information (but do not include these headings):
    - Name of internship director, credentials and title
    - Name of internship program and institution
    - Mailing address
    - Due date, *if different from February 15th*
    - The names of the other professors who are sending a letter for you to this program
  - A brief **description of each internship**/program, noting why you are specifically interested in it.
  - List of the names only of **any other internship** to which you are applying, but for which you do not need a letter of recommendation from this professor.
  - List of all courses (dietetics and otherwise) that remain to be completed before your graduation, along with intended completion dates and where you will complete them. Make sure to include courses that are currently in progress.
5. **E-mail your recommender an updated resume** that highlights the experience and skills relevant to the program you are applying to. Don't limit your resume to academic pursuits—include extracurricular activities, job experience, and honors.
  6. **(optional) E-mail a draft of your personal statement** or “statement of purpose”. This can give your professor a sense of your career interests and goals.
  7. **Drop off the following in the FCS office** after you have e-mailed the three documents above:
    - The appropriate number of **signed waiver forms** (first page of the ADA recommendation form) for each professor. Each form must have an original signature (not copied). Note that letters for students who do not waive their right to view them are taken less seriously or ignored.
    - Your **portfolio** so professors can look at it, if they so desire.
    - Please do not bring any mailing envelopes.
  8. **Send a thank you note.** After each professor has notified you when the letter(s) is/are ready for pick up or have been mailed, consider thanking her formally. Faculty can spend several hours constructing a single letter; it's nice to be acknowledged. And let us know by e-mail about whether you got the position!
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In summary, to start this process, here is a checklist of what to do:

- ✓ Meet with your professor before the end of finals autumn quarter
- ✓ E-mail the information above (in a Word document) by January 1
- ✓ E-mail your resume and draft of personal statement by January 1
- ✓ Drop off the appropriate number of signed waiver forms and your portfolio at the FCS office

### *Common Mistakes to Avoid:*

1. **Never assume** that a professor will be willing to write you a letter. Always ask first, even if the professor has written a letter for you in the past. You should also ask for permission to list a professor's name as a reference on an application, even if no letter is required.
2. **Don't just drop off forms and info** with the office assistant or send them as e-mail attachments—meet with the professor in person to discuss your qualifications, your choice of programs, the requirements, the deadlines.
3. **Don't harass professors** about whether they have sent the letter yet, unless they ask you to send a reminder. The professor will send you an e-mail to confirm that the letter is completed.