

Asking for References

References are becoming more important in many careers. Companies are looking more toward character and less toward specific knowledge, looking more for good people than just for geniuses. The best way to get to know the inner person in 10 minutes or less? Letters of reference.

Here are some tips you can share with your students:

- Don't ask for a recommendation letter by e-mail.
- Don't spring it on the faculty member. Don't ask before or after class, in the hall or at any other random time. Instead, arrange an appointment, explaining that you wish to discuss your plans. This gives the professor a "heads up" and a chance to think about whether he or she can write a helpful letter on your behalf.
- Don't ask, "Could you write a letter?" Instead ask, "Do you feel that you are able to write a letter supporting (for example) my application for a marketing internship at Indiana INTERNnet?" Ask whether the faculty member feels that he or she can write a "helpful letter." You don't need any old letter - you need a good letter.
- Prepare. Discuss the reasons why you would be the best choice for the internship(s). Also, list those to which you are applying (and why), internship goals, future aspirations and why you believe the faculty member is a good candidate to write a letter on your behalf.
- Print out a job description for each desired internship so that faculty can customize your letters of reference accordingly.
- Writing a letter of recommendation isn't easy. Make your request at least one month before the due date. Earlier is better.
- Provide the professor with recommendation forms, transcript, essays and other essential information.
- Pay attention to signals that the faculty member does not want to write a letter on your behalf. Anything other than a glowing letter can harm your chances at securing the internship.

