

## 13 Wrong Ways To Ask Recommendation Letter

To land a job or get into a university, we usually need someone to vouch for us. It can be tough to ask—recommenders are typically more senior than us, they're busy, and we don't always know where we stand in their eyes. When we work up the courage to ask, sometimes the request comes out polite and charming. But more often than we realize, we end up saying or writing the wrong thing.

Here are some of the most ineffective requests that I've seen as a manager and professor, along with a running commentary on what a cynical recommender might read between the lines. My hope is that we'll all get a little bit more thoughtful about who, how, and when we ask.

1. Although we haven't talked in seven years, I really value your opinion of me.

I've burned a lot of bridges, and I'm desperately hoping enough time has passed that you won't remember what a jerk I was.

2. I'm not sure if you remember me, but it would be amazing if you could serve as a reference for my application.

Our interactions were so brief that I forgot you existed until just now. But I'm desperate.

3. I'm wondering if you might write me a recommendation letter. It's due tomorrow.

You really shouldn't vouch for me (I'm not conscientious, and I procrastinate a lot), and I think little enough of you to ask you to do this last minute. But I'm really desperate.

4. I know we've never met in person, but you have a unique perspective on my qualifications.

If you knew me better, you wouldn't even consider advocating for me. Also, the first dozen people I asked said no.

5. It would be really great to have your name supporting my candidacy.

There are other people who know me much better, but no one respects them (including me).

6. Please write a recommendation letter for me.

I want to think I'm hot stuff, but really I'm a doofus. If I ask, you'll probably turn me down. If I frame it as a command, maybe you'll be intimidated into agreeing.

7. Thank you for your advice on my resume and cover letter last week. You can send your recommendation letter to this address.

I neglected to do my homework when we spoke, and didn't realize I would need a recommendation. Maybe you won't recall that I never asked.

8. Are you in a position to write me a glowing letter?

I trust you enough to say nice things about me, but only if they're really nice. Before I give you the privilege of writing on my behalf, I really need to know what you think of me.

9. You can send the letter to me, and I'll mail it in.

I'm going to read it first to see if I like it.

10. The application requires three recommendation letters, but I've decided to submit four.

I'm hedging my bets in case one of my references trashes me or drops the ball.

11. The application requires three letters, and I'm excited to submit five.

There's no way three people can possibly capture the full extent of my greatness.

12. To save you some time, I've taken the liberty of drafting the letter for you.

I seriously doubt your ability to sing my praises—and I am seriously more awesome than you think I am.

13. It's a highly competitive pool, and I want the hiring committee to know about my unique strengths, so here's a list of my proudest achievements over the past decade.

I'm feeling highly insecure, and I don't know if my dad can pull any strings this time. Please include every impressive thing I've ever done, including the time I dominated the Springfield-Harbortown Elementary Spelling Bee. "Intravert" is a totally acceptable spelling.

By contrast, here's one of the best recommendation requests I've ever seen:

"I was hoping you would be willing to write me a letter of recommendation because I have interacted with you over the past couple of years more than with any other professor here. I have made countless mistakes as a team leader, including micromanaging in our first weeks as a club, not giving proper feedback to my teammates about their performance, and not being able to defuse tension at board meetings. But I have also grown tremendously, especially with the help of your advice on..."