

Advices for asking for a letter of recommendation

(The content of this page is mostly taken from [Ravi Vakil](#).)

You likely have a lot on your mind right now, and this is the last thing you want to worry about, but it deals with a central part of your application. Letter-writing is one of my most important duties. Although it may seem obvious, many people seem to overlook this:

It is in your interest to make your busy letter writer's job as easy as possible.

Timeline.

- **Contact:** Email me to request a letter of recommendation **at least 3 weeks in advance of your first deadline.**
- **Discussion:** Shortly after this, we will discuss if I am a good choice for you. If I feel that I am not able to write a strong or compelling letter, I will let you know. This reinforces the 3-week advance request – giving you ample time to find a replacement.
- **Supporting Documents:** If I agree to write the letter, please send **all supporting documents** and a **list of programs/jobs where you will apply**, along with their deadlines, **two weeks before the first deadline.**

Supporting Documents. You want to help your recommender write as detailed a letter as possible. Here are some things that would help. Only some may apply to you:

- CV
- Transcript (if you are an undergrad)
- Everything you will submit with your application (e.g.: personal essay, research summary, research proposal); very good drafts will do in a pinch. (*Corollary: finish your part of the application early.*)
- Who else is writing you a letter (so I can mention things that might not otherwise be covered)
- Is there anything in particular you would like me to address? (Are there specific theorems/papers you hope I'll write about? Are there theorems/papers that others will discuss more?) Are there particular qualities you would prefer that I discuss?
- Any other information that might help the writer