



Choosing Teachers to Write Your Letters of Recommendation

A Guide for Students

Selecting the right teachers to write your letters is one of the most important decisions you will make when applying to college. To identify the right teachers, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What teachers have seen your very best work? Don't just think about the grade you earned. Think about the projects you did, the questions you asked, and the way you involved yourself in the class. Some of the strongest letters of recommendation can sometimes come from teachers who didn't necessarily give you an "A."
2. In which courses did you participate the most? Where did you ask questions, contribute to class discussions, or talk with the teachers outside of class about the subject matter?
3. In which classes did you find the material the most interesting? Did the teacher know how interested you were? How did they know? Did you speak with her after class, do additional reading, or take on extra projects? A teacher who can comment on your sincere interest in the subject matter is often a very good choice as a person to write your letter.

A few "Don'ts"

1. Don't worry about asking a science or math teacher to write a letter for fear the letter won't have the elegant prose that an AP English teacher might provide. Admissions officers aren't going to reward or punish you based on how your teacher writes. But they will reward or punish you based on what your teacher has to say about you, so choose carefully.
2. Don't pick a teacher just because she likes you a lot. Obviously, you don't want to pick a teacher who *doesn't* like you, but if a teacher rambles on for two pages about what a nice, wonderful person you are, the colleges still won't know anything about your academic work or potential. Teachers should focus almost entirely on your academic achievement and intellectual potential; it's up to you to choose the teacher(s) who can do that.
3. Don't choose a teacher because of how much they know about your activities. The U.S. history teacher who was also your ASB advisor might still be a good choice, but remember, you **DON'T** need him to write about your ASB involvement. You need him to write about what you're like in his U.S. history class.
4. Don't choose a teacher from ninth grade. That's ancient history in the colleges' eyes, and it makes it seem like you couldn't find anybody more recent to ask. The best letters usually come from your 11th grade teachers, and sometimes your 12th grade teachers (especially if they have previously taught you).
5. Don't be disrespectful of your teachers' time. Ask early, provide all the necessary materials, and take the time to write a sincere thank-you note to each teacher who writes a letter for you. And while you're at it, write a thank-you note to your counselor, too.

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