

Recommendations Policy, Prof. Christian Lotz, Michigan State University, Philosophy Department

General rule 0

I have to recognize your face and name. If you've taken a number of classes with me, never spoken in class, met with me outside of class, or distinguished yourself in some way in my memory, something has gone wrong. If I know your name in class, I'll probably remember it a few years later.

General rule 1

I only write letters for undergraduate students who have taken at least two classes with me. I will only in rare cases make exceptions. If you only take one class with a professor, all they can write about is your performance in that one class. What's more compelling to readers of your application is seeing consistency or trajectory — i.e. either that you are a solid, high achieving student across classes, or that you are maturing as a student and are improving in your achievements.

General rule 2

A student must write an original research paper in at least one of the classes taken with me. It's fine to write about your performance on tests, quizzes and your general classroom behavior and achievements, but what's even more important is the ability of a letter writer to speak to your ability to conduct original research and write a compelling, well-argued research paper — since that's what you're going to have to do in graduate school.

General rule 3

I only write letters for students who waive their right to read and have access to my letter.

General rule 4

If I think writing for you might present a problem, I will tell you so in advance and let you decide whether you want me to write. Send information to me by e-mail or attachment in Word, rtf, or pdf so cut-and-paste is made easy.

Notice

I need a minimum of one month's notice (more if school breaks intervene) to write the initial letter.

Essentials

1. any referee forms provided to you by the institutions to which you are applying (note that, especially during the summers, you may need to mail those to my home, and note that such forms often include portions that *you* must complete first),
2. the person, persons, or committee to whom the letter should be directed.
3. the addresses to which the letters are to be sent (I will send you an MS_Word file with blank address labels. Please fill in your addresses and return the file to me),
4. the deadlines for the letters' receipt, and
5. a reminder of what courses, if any, you took with me and in what years.
6. For any letters to be submitted on-line, provide the url by e-mail.
7. If you are providing information to institutions about your referees so they can be contacted, the telephone number you should use for me is (517) 355-4490.

Reminder

When a member of faculty writes a recommendation for a student or former student — regardless of how very much s/he hopes the student will succeed — s/he nevertheless has an obligation to colleagues elsewhere to provide an assessment of the student's qualities that does not deliberately hide anything relevant to the position sought.