



## Obtaining Effective Letters of Recommendation

**Understand what kind of recommendations are expected.** Some programs give recommenders specific instructions. Others want them to answer specific questions. Know what's expected and communicate this information to your letter writers.

**Select the right recommenders.** The better they know you, the better. The strongest letters for academic research fellowships come from professors in the field. Since your application highlights your accomplishments as a college student, do not ask high school teachers for recommendation letters.

**Meet with your potential recommenders** and tell them your plans to apply for the fellowship. Also be sure to communicate the selection criteria. *If the professor understands the selection criteria, he or she will be able to address them in the letter.*

**Tell your recommenders why you chose them.** This will help them write your letters. For example, if you tell professor X that you chose him because you thought he could speak about your original scholarship or work in a particular lab, this information will help him say just that!

**Share a draft of your personal statement and statement of grant purpose** well in advance of the application deadline.

**Request your recommendation letters at least a month in advance of the deadline**, if your recommenders have not written a letter for you before. If they have written one before, then request the letter no less than three weeks in advance, giving them time to tailor it for the fellowship.

**Don't hesitate to send your recommenders a gentle reminder** in anticipation of the submission deadline, and don't wait until the last moment to do so. Professors are busy people. Chances are they'll appreciate the reminder.