



COLORADO COLLEGE  
**Career Center**



# RECOMMENDATIONS VS. REFERENCES

---

## **Letters of Recommendation are:**

- Testimonials by professors, past employers, coaches, etc. that describe your abilities, skills, character and speak on your work or academic performance.
- The letters are typically sent to a hiring manager or admission officer who is deciding whether to employ or admit a candidate.

## **References are:**

- People who agree to speak about your abilities, skills and character. These people are generally previous supervisors, coaches, professors, advisors, etc.
- During the hiring process employers will ask you to submit a list a 3-5 references. Some applications will specify what type of references you need (e.g. 3 supervisors, 2 coworkers).
- References DO NOT write you a letter, you would simply provide the contact information for your references to an employer.

**It is important to know the difference between "letters of recommendation" and "references". A job or graduate school application will indicate if you need letters of recommendation or just references.**

## **Tips on References:**

- When choosing a reference it is important to pick people who you have a good relationship with and that you feel they could speak highly of you and your previous work/academic experience.
- You should not choose family or close friends to be your references, unless instructed to.
- You should ask someone if they are willing to serve as a reference for you **BEFORE** you submit an application.
- If you have gone through a round of interviews and know the employer will be reaching out to your references it is always nice to give the references a heads up that they might be getting an email or phone call.

## **Letters of Recommendation: Laying the Ground Work**

The key to getting great letters of recommendation is by building meaningful and enduring relationships with faculty and staff.

### **Start building relationships early!**

Interact with your professors face to face and go to their office hours. If you're undeclared but have some ideas of what you want to major in, introduce yourself to faculty in that department.

**Remember your advisor!** Whether you're undeclared or you've asked a faculty member in your department, your advisor is here to help you. Set up meetings outside of course registration to get to know them.

**Be genuine!** Faculty and staff can tell when you are using them to get something. Approaching a professor whom you've put in the effort to develop a respectful relationship is very different than approaching someone you had for one block two years ago.

**Continue to maintain the relationships!** Don't disappear after the block is over, or after you graduate. Check in occasionally, ask questions, share what you're up to.

By your junior year you should be able to identify several faculty members who you could comfortably approach about recommendations. If you have not developed relationships with faculty and staff or you are unsure how to start, come to the Career Center.

### **Asking for a Letter of Recommendation:**

Begin the process at least four weeks before you need the letter. Many recommenders will not be able to help you if you give a short timeline OR they might not be able to write you the best quality letter.

- Ensure that you are selecting someone who is familiar with you and your work and who can speak highly of your talents and abilities.
- If possible, go to the professor/staff in person to ask them to write a letter of recommendation for you. If you have moved away from CO Springs it is okay to send an email.
- Start the conversation off by saying you are applying for Graduate School/Job and that you are wondering if they could write you a letter of recommendation. Explain why you think they would be a good recommender for you.

### **Information to Give to Your Recommender:**

- If possible, make an appointment with your recommender to talk about what opportunity you are applying for, why you think its a good fit, your relevant experiences and skills, etc.
- Provide your recommender with your resume, job description/program description, transcripts, personal statement, and any other materials that you think would be helpful for them to have as they write your letter.
- Provide a date that you are hoping for the letter to be done by and also provide the deadline established by the employer or college.
- If the employer/college is requiring that the letters of recommendation be mailed provide the recommenders with an envelope that is addressed and has sufficient postage.

### **Thanking your Recommender:**

- A week or so before the letter is due, confirm with your recommenders that it has been or will be sent.
- Send a thank you note or email to each person who has written you a letter of recommendation.
- Keep your recommenders updated on your job or graduate school search, and let them know if you get accepted to a program or job.