

What to do if you want me to write a letter of reference for you.

I take the responsibility of writing letters of reference very seriously, and consequently devote considerable time to writing them. To enable me to write the best possible letter, you need to do some things first (I mean, *apart from* being the best possible student you can be...). And remember, every omission on your part makes the job of writing a letter more difficult, so attend carefully to the details sketched below.

1. Don't ask me for a letter the day before it's due. You won't get it. I have a busy life, and I can't reorganize my schedule at the drop of a hat to accommodate your lack of planning, procrastination, sloth, etc.
2. It follows from the above that I'd like as much lead time as possible to write a letter. For example, if you're going to apply to law school or graduate school you should be planning that the summer *before* your senior year and organizing your letters of reference accordingly. If you have a deadline, *tell me what it is!* Except in very special circumstances, the *minimum* notice I need to write a letter of reference is two weeks. Telling me that you've only just found out about an opportunity is not a special circumstance; that's bad planning on your part.
3. Tell me what you're applying for. Sounds obvious, I know, but sometimes students neglect to do so. In the competitive world in which we live, sometimes a one-size-fits-all letter won't suffice. If at all possible, when you ask for a letter give me some literature about the job/internship/institution or whatever you're applying for/to. It helps a lot. And don't forget to give me any *forms* that must be completed to accompany a letter of reference.
4. Over the years I've written letters for students who have taken numerous courses with me and whom I know very well, and I've done them for students who took one class with me three, four, or even five years earlier. In the latter case, you need to have made an impression for me, first, to agree to write a letter and, second, to be able to write a good one. But the greatest help for me in writing a letter – and this applies equally (except in some very special cases) to those I know well and to those I don't – is, first, a current résumé and, second, *any* other information about you that will help me both to flesh you out as a character and to aid my understanding of and appreciation for you that I have developed inside and outside class. For example, if you have to write a personal statement, let me have a copy.
5. Finally, it's a simple matter of courtesy to let me know how you get on – whether you get the job/fellowship/place in law or graduate school or whatever. But also I'm genuinely interested in how you fare.

These are the coordinates that are most likely to get me, in descending order of preference:

e-mail: scole@ndnu.edu

' 650 508 3548

Office: St Joseph's Hall 118