Letter of Recommendation

You want to provide the group that is reviewing your application with a full picture of you. To accomplish this goal, I recommend using the following guidelines.

1. Come up with a list of traits that you would like the reviewers to know about.
2. Determine how many letters of recommendation you are allowed to submit.
3. Create an outline similar to this: (example for 3 letters of recommendation)



1. Put your different traits into each category (1 trait per letter, so in this example you are listing 6 traits), so each color circle represents a different letter writer
2. Send an email to your letter writers, after previously asking them to write a letter for you, and ask them if they would highlight these traits about yourself (see example below).

Ideas to keep in mind

* Send your up to date resume/CV to the letter writer.
* Let the letter writer know how they will be delivering the letter of recommendation.
* If the application requires additional information, such as an essay, give that to the letter writer (if you are still editing the essay you can send your outline or a brief description of what your essay will cover)
* Keep the letter writer updated on how many requests they will receive (an excel spreadsheet is nice)
* After the letters have been written/delivered, make sure you thank the letter writer (an email or card is great!)
* Let the letter writer know what happens – how many acceptances, where you are choosing to go, etc.
* For undergraduates it is less common, but for graduate students it is common to write your own letter of recommendation and then the recommender will make edits before submission (this is a great opportunity for you because then you can draft the image of yourself that is shown to the committee)

Sample email requesting a letter of recommendation (in person meetings are best, but this can either serve as a follow up or in place of a meeting with a very busy person):

Dear Dr. XXXX,

I am in the process of applying to REU programs for this summer and would really appreciate it if you could write a letter of recommendation for me. As the department chair and my direct supervisor when I was a TA for XXX I feel that a letter from you could really help my application to stand out.

Since last fall I have joined Dr. XXX’s lab and have really enjoyed the opportunity to perform research. I am considering applying to graduate schools next fall (to start in the fall of 2018) and I think that experiencing another school’s program during this upcoming summer will help me decide whether graduate school is right for me.

Dr. Iverson mentioned that with your busy schedule it might be easier for you if I provided a draft of a letter along with my CV, if this is something that would be helpful I would be happy to do so. The first applications will be due on January 30th (I can provide a list of the programs that I would like to apply to and application deadlines if that would be helpful).

Please let me know if you would be able to write a letter for me.

Thank you,

XXX

Sample email request after initial ‘Will you write a letter for me?’ request (if you are not writing a draft of the letter).

Dear Dr. XXXX,

Thank you for writing a letter of recommendation for me. I have also asked Dr. XXX and Dr. XXX, my previous lab and work supervisors, to write letters for me. I am attempting to provide a well-rounded impression to the admissions committee and have therefore asked Drs. XXX and XXX to discuss my leadership skills, personability (ability to work with many different types of people), proficiency in lab and reliability.

If you would be comfortable commenting on my leadership skills, proficiency in lab and creativity (ability to think outside the box) I would really appreciate it.

If there is any additional information that I can provide please let me know.

Thank you again,

XXX