

## **Recommendation Letters from Dr. Clark-Foos Instructions for Students**

I am happy to write letters of recommendation for students who have done well in my classes or who have been reliable contributors to my lab. Writing recommendation letters is a time-consuming process, but it is an important service for students, and I take it very seriously.

The hardest part of writing a letter is writing the first draft; subsequent letters are generally just a matter of replacing the name of one school with another. Before I can write a good letter for you, I need you to provide me with as much information as possible, so that my letter can be informed and specific. I need a copy of the information requested below *at least a month* before your letter is "due." Please don't ask me to put the work into writing a letter before you have done the work of putting together the information and writing your personal statement.

### **Here are some guidelines:**

1. You generally should only ask me to write you a letter if you have made an A or a B in my class, have worked in my lab, and/or if we have talked on several occasions about your post-college plans. In some cases I might be able to write a good letter for a student who has gotten less than a B in my class, but generally this level of performance wouldn't allow me to make a strong endorsement of your academic potential.
2. Put all of this information together at least a month before the first deadline. Feel free to talk to me if you have questions or are unsure about any part of it, but the earlier you get started on this, the better. Contact the UMD Career Services office or the CASL Advising Office (room 1039 CB) for information if you are unsure of how to create a vita or resume, how to write a personal statement, etc.
3. Writing the personal statement is the most difficult part of the process of applying for graduate school. There are many websites and books available with advice and guidelines on how to get. I will be happy to give you feedback on your personal statement if you get it to me at least a month before your first grad school deadline. One bit of advice: be sure to talk about your specific experiences that are relevant for that program, why you are applying to that **specific** program, and what your goals are to do with your degree. You need to do your homework on the programs to which you are applying. It needs to sound like a professional statement of background and goals, and not like a "diary entry." Most graduate school admissions committees are looking for specific information and clear goals, not creativity, in the essay.
4. If you are using me as a reference for a job or are applying to programs that do not require a personal statement, I still need you to write out a description of your career goals, what type of job you hope to get, etc.
5. It actually helps me to receive an electronic version of these documents, because then I can do some "cut and paste" rather than retyping your different experiences or credentials. So, along with your personal statement, feel free to send me an electronic file that includes some written statements in the third person such as "Joe has spend the last three summers working as a camp counselor at a camp for children with physical challenges" or "Mary made the dean's list every semester as an undergraduate." PLEASE help me highlight the things that you think set you apart!
7. Unfortunately, I am getting old and I will NOT remember what class(es) you took from me, and in what semester. I need to you to specify this for me -- e.g., "I took PSYC 363 from you in Fall 2009, and I worked in you lab in Summer and Fall 2010." Please be specific -- I need to put this in the letter and I can't always figure it out easily from your transcript.

## Information Checklist (needed at least a month before the first deadline):

\_\_\_\_\_ Your vita (or resume). Be sure to include information on research experiences, extracurricular activities, or anything else that you think would be relevant for me to mention in your letter. I especially appreciate receiving this in an electronic format with things written in third person, that I can cut and paste into your letter.

\_\_\_\_\_ Your personal statement (the essay in which you outline your goals and reasons for applying to graduate school). I would like a **specific** draft of a statement that you are writing for a specific school. If you give it to me early enough, I will give you feedback before you turn it in. Please ask me specifically if you'd like me to do this.

\_\_\_\_\_ a copy of your transcripts (unofficial is fine), with the courses you took with me highlighted. I need your ENTIRE transcript, so I can evaluate the courses you have taken overall. Please make a note in your email which classes you took from me, and in which semester.

\_\_\_\_\_ a LIST: all the schools to which I will send a letter, including application deadlines. Organize the list chronologically, by the date on which the letter is due. Please be sure to list the precise degree you are seeking, and give me the exact name of the department (e.g., seeking a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the Department of Psychology; seeking a M.Ed. in Counseling from the Department of Educational Psychology). Please pay attention to this – even if we talk about what programs you're applying to, I won't remember that conversation later and I need to be able to see all this on one page.

\_\_\_\_\_ your GRE scores, or other professional scores. This will help me comment if I feel that the scores are not reflective of your academic potential. Please don't forget to tell these to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ addressed and stamped envelopes for all letters. Note: I strongly prefer envelopes that don't have to be licked (i.e., envelopes with peel-off adhesive). Be sure to put my **full** return address on the front. Be sure to type these or write them **neatly**. Note: if the school asks you to return all letters with your application, and you plan to pick up the letters from me, then you don't need a stamp on those envelopes, but be sure to put the name of the school, and your name, somewhere on the envelope so you'll know which school the letter is for. Please note: if these letters are going to other departments on campus, you do not need a stamp -- I can send them campus mail.

\_\_\_\_\_ recommendation forms for the schools that provide them. **IMPORTANT:** If the forms have a place for my name and contact information to be filled in, YOU do it (neatly) -- check the back of the form as well!

Complete all information on the form, including my name, address, etc:

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Put all materials together in a large manila envelope, with your name and the date of the first deadline on the front. I'm also happy to receive as much electronically as possible. I receive many requests to write letters each fall, and this will help me organize my time. I also ask that you email me a reminder approximately one week before the first letter is due. I will not mind this reminder; in fact, I will appreciate it!