

YOUR GUIDE TO

LETTERS OF REC

From Making Connections to Making the Ask



Lyman Briggs College
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

LETTERS OF REC

Building Relationships

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Every professional connection you make is a chance to develop a relationship that can lead to long-term connection, mentorship... and a strong letter of recommendation. When meeting new people the time and effort you put into the conversation can help to lay the ground work for your professional success down the road; these may include...

- **Professors:** Actively participate in class, go to office hours, express an interest in their research; building strong connections beyond the classroom will give your professors more to talk about in their letters of recommendation than the good grades you got in their course.
- **Supervisors:** Doing your best at work whether in the research lab, at an on-campus job, or in a clinical setting can do more than just boost your resume. Supervisors can provide insight into your dedication, attention to detail, and ability to take initiative in the workplace.
- **Professionals in Industry:** Whether through shadowing, collaborating, or working together, having a professional in your industry who can speak to your ability to contribute to the work and readiness to take on continuing education in the field is an asset.
- **Volunteer Managers/Student Organization Advisors:** Serving others and leading teams through volunteer work and student organizations can provide you with experiences that are valuable to your professional development; work on connecting with managers and advisors who can provide perspective on your communication and organizational skills.

MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS

Making these connections is important, but maintaining them even moreso! Make it a point to check in with your former faculty, supervisors, and professional connections periodically to ensure that your skills remain top of mind. It's a good idea to keep track of your interactions, and to reflect on the skills you developed during your time with them. Using this [google doc](#) can help you to detail your experiences. Your entries may look something like this:

NAME	ROLE	EMAIL	SKILLS/STORIES
Dr. Tia Smith	Biology Instructor, PI - Smith Lab	tia@msu.edu	Critical thinking skills- working through challenges in the lab; learning to ask for help, use resources Communication- teaching new members pipetting techniques, commitment to education

LETTERS OF REC

Making the Initial Ask

THE INITIAL ASK

When gathering your letters of recommendation/support, it's important to start early and connect often. While your first ask may take place in person, it's always a good idea to put your ask in writing, giving both you and your recommender a reference to come back to.

- **Lock it down:** Make the ask when the connection is fresh. If you take a class with a professor during your second year, and you think you'll want them to write a letter of recommendation, don't wait to ask! Making your verbal ask at the end of the semester is a good way to initiate an ask you can follow up on when you're getting ready to apply to graduate/professional school.
- **Check in:** Like any good relationship, mentoring relationships require maintenance. Check in with your recommenders throughout the year (ideally once per semester); this can be a short email letting them know what you're up to, or a quick meeting to talk about their research and what you've been working on, too.
- **Make it official:** Between 3-6 months before you plan to submit your application, send the email confirming that your letter writer is still willing to write you a recommendation, and give them some detail on what you're hoping they'll touch on.

SAMPLE EMAIL: INITIAL ASK

While you should adapt this template to make your own, use [page 2 of this google doc](#) to write your own 'initial ask' emails for your letter writers. We're providing a full sample below.

Dear Tia,

I hope you're having a great week!

As you might remember, I am preparing to apply to medical school this year. I value your opinion and perspective given how much I have learned from working with you in the lab and in the classroom. Learning techniques and processes, coming up with new ways forward, and training new members of the lab helped me to develop my critical thinking skills and my ability to communicate with, and educate, others. Overall, my time in the lab has also helped me to develop an appreciation for scientific inquiry and teamwork; thank you so much for this experience!

I'm wondering if you might be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for my application. Again, I really value how much you've been able to teach me and I know that my experience in your lab has shaped me; the skills I gained here will be an important part of my medical journey.

If you could please let me know within the next 2 weeks if you would be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for medical school, I would really appreciate it. This will help me as I begin planning for my application timeline. Over the next few months, I will be continuing my studies at MSU and will also be at the center frequently for my volunteer shifts, so you'll see plenty of me. I would plan to send you a draft of my personal statement along with my resume by April 15. I'm also happy to send over any other materials that you think would be helpful.

Thank you for your consideration and support; I look forward to hearing from you!

LETTERS OF REC

Making it Official

THE OFFICIAL ASK

When it's time to submit your application, it's time to reach out to your letter writers again. **Before sending the email below, send a quick note to confirm that they are still willing and able to write you a letter of recommendation.**

Once you have receive confirmation, it's time to send a more detailed message.

In this email, you'll want to ensure that your recommenders have the logistical information and context they need about your application, and that they are ready to speak to the skills and competencies you've developed during your time with them, preferably using specific examples using the PARK method.

LOGISTICS

- What types of programs are you applying for?
- When did you work/volunteer/learn from them (dates are helpful!)?
- When do you hope to have the letter by?

CONTEXT

- What are your long term goals?
- What do you hope to gain from this experience you are applying to?
- What were your biggest takeaways/lessons during your time with them?
- *Include your resume & personal statement if possible*

THE SPECIFICS

Think about the skills you developed with this recommender over the time that you have known/worked with them. Provide 2-3 PARK examples for 1-2 tangible skills or competencies that you developed through your work.

- **Problem:** Think about a specific scenario you worked through with them that helped you to develop a skill. What was the situation that you worked through with them? Give a brief overview.
- **Action:** What did you do to address the issue? This is the place for you to specifically talk about the skills you used with them!
- **Results:** As a result of all of your work, what happened?
- **Knowledge:** What did you learn from this scenario with your letter writer? How will this new knowledge inform your approach in the future?

**Sample email on the last page*

FINAL NOTES

Want to talk through strategy for building relationships, making the ask, or narrowing down your list? **Contact us at LBcareer@msu.edu.**

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Making it Official

SAMPLE EMAIL: OFFICIAL ASK

While you should adapt this template to make it your own, you can use [page 3 of this google doc](#) to write your own 'initial ask' emails for your letter writers. We're providing a sample below.

Hello Tia,

It's hard to believe, but I'm officially getting ready to apply to medical school. I can't thank you enough for all of your support in helping me to get to this point: both as my PI and my professor; I appreciate you being willing to write me a letter of recommendation. While I will defer to your expertise, I wanted to give you somewhere to provide some thoughts on how I developed my skills while working with you in the lab and in the classroom.

As you probably remember, when I joined the lab, there were many new techniques I had to learn; outside of my coursework, immunohistochemistry was totally new to me. When I found myself struggling, I knew I couldn't keep using the same method of trial and error, and so I used my resources. Seeking out video tutorials online helped some, but asking some of the other students and graduate students if I could observe them made all the difference. I studied their technique, and then asked them to watch as I completed the task, asking them to point out what I was doing wrong. I continued to practice, even revisiting the literature we'd gone over in training, taking into consideration how different factors might be impacting my results. When I finally got it- I was thrilled! I finally put together images of protein expression so clear I could count the dots without squinting! I felt empowered not dwelling on failure, but instead growing from it by asking better questions and seeking support. These problem-solving abilities will help me in medical school and in my work as a physician, helping me to consider different angles when treating patients and to collaborate with my team to improve my skills.

Being part of your LB144 class in the Spring of 2023 also helped me to build my teamwork and communication skills, as I worked with my lecture and lab group in class, and even went on to present with them at UURAF. Collaborating with my team to develop our abstract, poster, and presentation challenged me to find ways to communicate complex ideas in an accessible way. I practiced with my teammates, but also with people who were less familiar with our research to ensure that the way I was explaining things would make sense to those we were presenting to. Developing my own understanding of the material also helped me to explain it better to others. After successfully presenting our poster, I realized just how far our skills had come. In medicine, I will present throughout my career, often with groups, both on cases where I did the right thing and on cases where I made mistakes. This experience prepared me to take in critical feedback and use it to adjust my approach, which will prepare me to do the same as a physician as I collaborate with my colleagues to find the best solutions possible for our patients.

I'll be sending you a link to upload your letter via the AMCAS application once the application is open; if you are able to submit by June 1, I would be so appreciative. I've attached my resume and personal statement draft as well; please let me know if there's anything else you need from me. Again, thank you so much!

Best,
L. Briggs