

**Requesting a Letter of Recommendation**  
**Steven Charles**

Please provide the following information at least 2 weeks before the letter is due:

- 1) A list of institutions to whom I need to submit the letter, together with the due dates for each institution (this does not have to be the final list—feel free to send me updated lists)
- 2) Resume with GPA
- 3) A draft letter using the template on the next page. I obviously reserve the right to change the draft as much as I want, but it will help me write a stronger letter. In preparation for writing the draft, it may be helpful to peruse the attached examples and to ponder the following questions:
  - a) If you are requesting letters of recommendation from multiple people, you may want each letter to focus on a different aspect of you. What would you like my letter to focus on?
  - b) Your goals
    - i) How does this letter (or the position for which you are applying) relate to your long-term goals?
    - ii) How have you prepared yourself to deserve this?
    - iii) What sets you apart from other applicants?
  - c) Your personal attributes
    - i) What are some of your favorite positive personal attributes? It may be helpful to ask someone who knows you well.
- 4) Very brief justifications for the following attributes. When submitting a letter of recommendation, I am often asked (in addition to submitting the letter) to rank the student (top 5%, 10%, 25%, 50%, etc.) against his/her peers in the following categories. Usually I have not interacted with a student in all categories and need to choose “No basis for judgment” for some categories. Please provide *brief* justification (1 sentence) for why I should rank you highly in categories in which I have not interacted with you (e.g. if you are my research assistant and have written a paper with me, you do not need to comment on your research or writing abilities).
  - a) Research ability
  - b) Intellectual ability for graduate work
  - c) Professional experience
  - d) Creative or innovative talent
  - e) Ability to write
  - f) Math/analytical ability
  - g) Leadership ability
  - h) Ability to work with others
  - i) Motivation and depth of commitment to graduate study
  - j) Ability to function independently
  - k) Teaching potential

Thank you!

Steven Charles

***Draft template of your letter***

Dear [Admissions Committee OR Fellowship Selection Committee OR something similar],

I am writing a letter of recommendation on behalf of [insert your full name], who is applying for [insert what you are applying for]. I have known [insert your first name] since [insert month and year] and in the following capacities: [insert all the major interactions we've had, e.g. instructor in a course, capstone coach, research assistant mentor in my lab, etc].

[Write one or two paragraphs describing your effort and performance. You probably asked me to write you a letter (as opposed to someone else) because you are proud of your effort and performance in my class/lab/team/other. In the next one or two paragraphs, describe one or two things you are proud of. Write the paragraph(s) from my point of view, and be as thorough as you can. *Detailed descriptions or examples are far more compelling than generic statements.*]

On a personal level, [insert your first name] is [list some of your favorite positive personal attributes. It may be helpful to ask someone who knows you well, but these must be attributes you have displayed in your interactions with me so that I can vouch for them. Some detailed descriptions or examples are more helpful than simply a list of attributes.]

***Letter for student who took multiple classes from me (but did not work for me) applying to grad school***

Dear Admissions Committee:

I have known ... for over a year and a half, and I have interacted with him in a variety of capacities, including as his instructor in two past undergraduate courses (System Dynamics, Mechatronics) and a current graduate course (Neuromechanics of Movement).

Among the many students I teach, ... has stood out as someone who chooses to work on difficult projects, engages, and applies his talents and superior engineering skills with daring and optimism. For example, in my Mechatronics course, teams of four students build a robot that autonomously navigates an arena, triggers a device that dispenses ping-pong balls, takes the balls to a corner indicated on the fly, and shoots or lifts the balls into a goal 18 inches off the floor of the arena. This is a challenging task in a short amount of time, and it often requires very long hours leading up to the end-of-semester competition. Consequently, the vast majority of teams choose a standard design concept, such as shooting or dumping the balls into the goal. In contrast, ...'s team was unusually creative and pursued the out-of-the-box idea of ....

Similarly, in his ... course, teams of two students were required to complete a semester project. Instead of choosing a standard optimization project, ... and his teammate were interested in applying their newfound ... skills to a problem in the area of human motor control. Since this is my area of expertise, they approached me and worked with me to find a suitable project, which ended up being quite a difficult problem. [Description of project]. Although ... had never taken a course or done research in human motor control, he and his teammate committed to this project and completed it with very little help from me.

Another characteristic that sets ... apart is his well-roundedness and ability to balance work, school, and social activities. ... has engaged in research experiences at BYU and at ..., gained experience through a year-long internship at a ... company, and taught ... for ... years. This ability to balance many competing demands is obviously a valuable asset in a graduate student.

My interactions with ... have been very positive. He communicates effectively, is easy to interact with, and gets along well with other students. I would consider myself fortunate to engage him as a graduate research assistant in my lab.

***Letter for undergrad research assistant in my lab applying for internship***

Dear Internship Selection Committee:

It is my pleasure to recommend ... as an intern at ... . I have known ... since October 2018, when he started attending the meetings of my Neuromechanics Research Group at Brigham Young University (BYU). I subsequently hired ... as an undergraduate research assistant, where he has worked for almost a year.

I have been very impressed with ...'s drive and self-initiative, especially for a student so early in his undergraduate program. For example, he has already been a research assistant in multiple labs at BYU. In addition, he enjoys educating himself on diverse engineering topics outside of course homework and assignments.

... is bright and works hard to master new topics. When he first started as a research assistant in my group, I assigned him to work on a project that required programming experience that was clearly beyond what he had taken in his coursework. Nevertheless, ... jumped in, buckled down, and with time learned what was necessary and completed the project to my satisfaction. Importantly, since the needed expertise was not in my research group, ... accomplished this project in a manner that was largely self-driven and independent, finding the right resources and people when he needed help. Since then, I have assigned him to a new project that requires concepts from robotics and signal processing that are, again, far beyond what he has seen in coursework. Again, he is jumping in and learning what is necessary to get the job done.

... is also trustworthy, reliable, and easy to get along with. He is kind and respectful in his interactions with others. On teams he frequently finds himself in a leadership role; he keeps the team on track with milestones, divides out tasks, covers for dropped responsibilities, and leads planning and training meetings. When necessary, he seeks out others with expertise he lacks. It has been a pleasure working with .... I have no doubt that he will succeed in engineering as a student and later as a professional, and I strongly recommend him as an intern at ....