Information for Recommendation Letters

How do you make sure that your messages are in sync? By being prepared and giving them the information they need to write their letters. Collect the information that you want your recommenders to have:

1. **A letter explaining:**
   - why you're applying to graduate school
   - what schools you're applying to (your list doesn't have to be final, but if, for example, you're applying only to New York or D.C. schools, your recommenders should know that, and why)
   - how you're positioning yourself in the rest of your application (if you're far enough along with your drafts, you should include your personal statement or statement of purpose; good recommenders will demand them)
   - which qualities you want them to address in their letters (you'll compile that list from the individual law schools' recommendation forms), along with suggested anecdotes and examples to illustrate them; and
   - when the letters are due (i.e., when you want them submitted to a school), and when you'll be checking in with them to follow up

2. **Your résumé**

3. **Your transcript**

4. **Copies of any graded class work and assignments for that professor,** as well as any exams you've taken for that class; for a professional recommender, copies of any reports, assignments, memos, and evaluations

5. **Stamped and addressed envelopes for mailing the letters to the school**

   It's best to present this information to them when you both have some time to review it together. Offer to take your recommender out to lunch or coffee so you can have a heart-to-heart about your strategy and your goals, and also so you can refresh your recommender's memory about your talents and performance. Make sure they know how to get in touch with you if they have any follow-up questions or run into any problems.

   Explaining your goals is particularly important when you meet with your recommenders. You will go a long way toward winning their unqualified support if you can persuade them that you've really thought about why you want a graduate degree and what your long-term career goals are.
A Student Guide to Obtaining Letters of Reference

Letters of reference should directly and specifically support your application for admission to professional or graduate school. The letters should focus upon those areas that directly pertain to your potential to succeed in a graduate program or within a profession. In all cases, however, the letters should be from people who know you well and can write about your academic and/or professional strengths and accomplishments with detail and specificity.

Establishing Faculty Contact
Establish contact with your instructors early in your college career. A conscientious, deliberate attempt to know and be known by faculty members in your major field of study will bring about greater opportunities for obtaining substantive and specific letters of support for graduate or professional school admission.

Letters of reference from faculty are more meaningful when based upon their personal knowledge of your abilities and performance as generated through a mutual interest or shared academic or learning activity.

Content Of Good Letters of Reference
You want to be certain that your writers are aware of all of your accomplishments so they can discuss the work you did with them in the context of your whole record. Students can help in the construction of their letters by providing certain information to the people who will be writing the letters.

Background information like transcripts, autobiographies, resumes, personal statements and research papers can help faculty members or professionals write thorough and substantive letters. Provide such documentation for your writers whenever possible.

If your letter-writers prefer, you can provide them with much of this information through a Career Portfolio – an online collection of your academic and extracurricular history – that you can set up through Career Services.

Requesting a Letter of Reference (Protocol)
1. Request letters of reference in person whenever possible. Allow enough time at that meeting to discuss your request, your background and any questions the letter-writer might have.
2. Be gracious in your request. Do not expect a letter as your right and also do not negate your right to ask.
3. Ask if the potential referee can write a substantive positive letter in support of your application. Never press a prospective referee to submit a letter when he or she appears hesitant to fulfill your request.
4. Provide a stamped, addressed envelope and any required reference forms if you expect your professor to send the letters directly to each school.
5. Allow at least two months between your request and the application deadline.
6. Always thank your referees in writing. A handwritten note is always appreciated.