

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

College of Arts & Sciences

Advising & Career Services

Letters of recommendation/Evaluations

Hard Copy and Electronic Letters of Recommendation

Hard copy letters of recommendation have long been the standard form for recommending a student but in the past they have only been able to be submitted via postal mail. Beginning with the 2013 cycle, applicants are now able to choose how recommenders are contacted and whether the recommendation is sent electronically via email or by hard copy via postal mail.

Letter of Recommendation and Electronic Evaluation Differences

Each law school is given the choice of how many letter of recommendations and/or evaluations they require. Looking at the differences between each format, letters of recommendation are more personalized, allowing recommenders more freedom to express growth and emphasize the applicant's unique strengths. The Letter of recommendation will be more beneficial if a reference has known the applicant for a long time and can speak in detail about their qualifications. Evaluations, on the other hand, provide evaluators with roughly 30 attributes ranking the applicant against his or her peers. Evaluators are also given the option of adding further insight through narrative explanation. Evaluations are a good option for recommenders who have a rich relationship with the student, but may not be knowledgeable about the attributes law schools are looking for, or may not know how to articulate how their specific insight converts to skills used in law. Note that law schools prefer that each recommender complete only one format.

Cultivate Recommender Relationships Early

Start to think about letters of recommendation and evaluations at the beginning of your college career. Cultivating these relationships throughout your undergraduate career will help your recommenders become well acquainted with you and your work so that they can write with meaningful insight. If you plan to ask professors, try to take multiple classes from the same professor and visit regularly during office hours to discuss course material and to share your career plans. Find opportunities to stand out academically. This could include applying for research or teaching assistant positions. Ideally, strong letters are those that commend your academic performance in depth.

Choosing Recommenders and Number of Letters/Evaluations

Law schools seek students who are articulate and think critically. As a result, most schools prefer recommendations from professors, as they can assess your academic training. You are encouraged to ask at least two professors for recommendations. If you are applying to a law school that requires more than two recommendations or if you feel you would get a stronger reference from an employment or internship supervisor, you may ask these sources as well. Ultimately, seek recommenders who can best speak to your academic ability, work ethic, and commitment to becoming an attorney. Avoid requesting recommendations from family friends, religious leaders, or "names in high places." While there is no universal number of letters of recommendation/evaluations required, most law schools require two recommendations, and will accept as

many as three or four. You need to carefully check the requirements of all of the law schools to which you are applying to be sure you are following its specific instructions. Admission committees appreciate having multiple perspectives as long as the letters of recommendation/evaluations are not overly repetitious.

Information to Provide Recommenders

Although recommenders may have the chance to see your work through classes, internships, or employment, do not presume they remember everything about you. It is a good idea to meet in person to share your reasons for pursuing law and your career goals. You may also want provide them with your resume, personal statement, a list of schools you are applying to with deadlines, and transcripts.

Requesting Letters of Recommendation through Law School Admission Council

When you register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) you will provide the names and contact information of your recommenders. That information, along with your Law School Admission Council (LSAC) account number and a barcode, will appear on a letter of recommendation form which you will print out to give to your recommenders. Inclusion of the account number and barcode will ensure that the letter will be matched with the correct account when received and scanned at LSAC, thus reducing the number of returned letters and possible data entry errors. Most applicants now waive the right to see the contents of their letters of recommendation. Recommenders who provide email addresses will be notified by email of the receipt of a letter by LSAC for verification purposes. Postcards will be used only if an email address fails or if no email address has been indicated.

Note for Electronic Letter of Recommenders – When requesting an electronic letter of recommendation, applicants are prompted to indicate whether they do or do not waive their right to access the letter. Once the email is sent to the recommender, applicants cannot change their choice to waive. Deleting a recommender and adding them back is also not allowed. Please make sure you have carefully indicated your choice to waive or not waive before submitting the electronic Letter of recommendation.

Requesting Evaluations through Law School Admission Council

As with Letter of recommendations, applicants provide the Credential Assembly Service with names and contact information of evaluators. LSAC will contact each of your evaluators individually. Evaluators will create a log-in and password for the LSAC website. Each evaluator will complete an online evaluation which consists of 30 attributes and skills which are deemed important for law school. Evaluators will also be able to add comments and examples to back up their rating. At this time not all law schools are participating in the online evaluation service; you should check with each school to which you are applying to determine its requirements. Similar to the letters of recommendation, if you waived your right to view the evaluation, you will not be able to read the specific comments and/or ratings. Again, not all schools are using this service, so please check with each school to which you intend to submit a completed application.

Additional Resources

Pre-Law Advising (<http://casadvising.syr.edu>)

LSAC (www.lsac.org)

American Bar Association (www.americanbar.org)