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# The dos and don'ts of asking for a letter of recommendation

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Applying for higher studies abroad is a thorn-filled road on which you are bound to be greeted by wearisome tasks at every turn. Concocting a moving personal statement, curating a dynamic activities list and researching your institutions of choice will take up a large chunk of your time. However, amidst all this, it is crucial that you don't forget about another very important aspect of your application — the letter of recommendation.

Many universities abroad ask for one or two letters of recommendation from your teachers and/or academic counsellors. Some might ask for a peer recommendation or a mentor/employer recommendation, but these are usually optional. Collecting recommendation letters can seem daunting but it is not something to fear if you keep these pointers in mind.

## Think about the teachers you would like a recommendation from

It is important that you choose a teacher with whom you have cultivated a decent relationship, who you can depend on to vouch for you, and has shown at least some modicum of interest in your future prospects.

Try to secure at least one recommendation from an educator teaching a subject related to your intended major. A good word from them about your aptitude for or curiosity about the field will highlight your interest in it. If you are focusing on liberal arts colleges, you can showcase the diversity of your academic prowess by asking for a recommendation from an educator specialising in a different field. This can allow you to show how well-rounded of a student you are. It is important, too, that the letters don't speak exclusively of your merits as a student but also as a person who exists outside of the realm of academia.

## Don't go in with your guns blazing

As tempting as it might be to leave the recommendation letters for the last, it won't do you any good to arrive at your teacher's desk a week before your application deadline and ask them to fulfil your request immediately. Give them at least a month or two to ensure they have enough time to create a thoughtful, meaningful letter.

Also ensure to not make demands regarding the contents of the letter itself. Teachers are unlikely to remember every detail about the students they've taught. So, you could just provide them a résumé or, at least, remind them of the achievements you would like them to speak of. However, putting emphasis on these things in a polite manner is very different from making demands.

## Remind, don't pester

As your deadline draws near, your hands might start itching to email your teacher — asking them to send in your letter of recommendation. It makes sense to be anxious, but you must remember that your teachers are likely drowning in work. A reminder or two via email, or a short visit to them in person should be enough.

Recommendation letters speaking about your personal character and academic capability can go a long way in securing a place at your university of choice. They not only highlight your past successes but also helps assess your ability to succeed in the future. Thus, be sure to put as much effort into them as you would into any other component of your application!

*Zaima has recently escaped the clutches of A Levels.*

# On surviving the transition from school to university

ARSHAD SALEH

The first major transition most students face is the one from high school to university. While this is an important and exciting time in their lives, it leaves many struggling to cope with the sudden changes and decisions one must now make.

Throughout the years our routines become centred around our school schedules. When to wake up, when to go home, even the faces you see on a regular basis and the annual exam stress cycles are all dictated by your school. To some, school becomes a home away from home, while to others it is merely a place that they must endure for a good few hours a day. Regardless, it becomes the backbone of your day-to-day life and once that is gone, it can feel as though life has lost its structure and regularity.

During the transition period, structure can be found in building new habits and devoting time toward your hobbies. The routine that you are confined to in your school years often leaves little room to focus on yourself. This is the perfect opportunity to build habits that will be beneficial in university, such as regularly planning out your tasks. This is also a great time to work on a healthier lifestyle by starting to exercise regularly or by doing something as simple as working on an improved sleep schedule, as the last couple years of school are commonly driven by long, sleepless nights.

Prioritising your mental health during this period is particularly important for a multitude of reasons. Throughout your school life, you are accustomed to working towards the same goals as your peers. This, however, is not the case once school is over. Students are now faced with the mammoth task of deciding

what they want to do with their lives as they begin the first chapter in their own unique journey. Students applying to undergraduate programs abroad may have already committed to a university, some may be preparing for admission tests for institutions at home, while others may opt toward taking a gap year, looking to improve their resume or just find their footing. Having broken off from the pack, you will begin moving at your own unique pace.

Many tend to feel overwhelmed and stuck in limbo during this time as they compare themselves to their peers and consequently feel like they are falling behind. Therefore, it is crucial to self-reflect frequently and remember that you are working towards your own goals, which are unaffected by what others may be achieving. Finding your own pace is instrumental to building your career going forward.

Although the transition phase from school to university is bittersweet, filled with changes and farewells, there is much to look forward to in a new chapter. Each

transition brings you closer to the goals you have strived for and the person you aspire to be.

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