

Hello,

This is a memo that I ended up writing for my senior level class, after we all realized that no one had *any* idea how to go about getting recommendation letters. The following advice is only my opinion, other professionals might disagree.

First, a word to the wise....if you ever want a second letter out of someone, be sure to ask for the first with *plenty* of advance warning! TWO or THREE WEEKS is what I mean!

Second, gather all the applications together if you can, so that you ask once for 4 different letters, not ask them weekly four weeks in a row.

Third, send only the required number of rec letters – they should be from people that match the job you are applying for as closely as possible, and they should be from people that know you as a professional. However, keep one recommender “on standby” in case another recommender gets sick, loses your info, etc.

Finally, do not bombard a professor with your c.v. and info until you have **POLITELY ASKED THEM**. Remember, they are doing *you* a favor!

So, how do I ask for rec letters? By providing *plenty* of information *well* in advance. The first time I would send a request out to a professor, I would include:

- a reminder of how you knew me in school (classes you took, etc.)
- a brief summary of my research interests
- a brief summary of my career interests
- clearly written deadlines in **bold**
- and a big fat thankyou in advance

The first item, a reminder, may seem silly to you. Be aware that profs meet 20-50 new students each and every year, and while they probably *do* remember you, it may take a tiny mental prod to remind them which student from the past 5 years you are.

The following pages represent two separate documents copied from ones that I actually used during a search for a job as a professor. The first two pages are from a request by me to a recommender for a rec letter. Keep in mind that this particular recommender and I have a long history, so the language is more familiar (and not in business letter format) than what may otherwise be appropriate.

Note that if this info is sent by email, the reviewer can just cut ‘n’ paste the addresses of the institutions (I only included the first page of these below). Also, there are links to the college departmental websites that the reviewer can click. Most importantly, I am asking for all the letters *once*, and the deadlines are in **bold**.

Also, notice my note about Jacksonville....be honest at all points in the application process – emphasize your strengths, be confident ... but be able to honestly justify to your recommender why you are qualified for the position.

The last page in this document is part of my application package...it has identical font and margins as my CV. It lists 3 letter givers, but also lists an "extra" person. I change the recommenders and extras, and their research interest descriptions, to match the individual position.

Best of luck,  
Joel

Joel L. Carlin, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Biology  
Whitman College

**SAMPLE LETTER REMINDING RECOMMENDERS WHO ALREADY VERBALLY AGREED TO WRITE FOR ME.**

Hello ----,

Over the Christmas holiday I put together a few applications, and now am in need (yet again) of recommendations. Other than Whitman College (due in a week), none of these have a deadline *per se*, most state that they are “beginning to review applications” in the spring semester.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Note</b>
Whitman College	First-year bio, specialty open, pref. plants	<b>Due 12 Jan!</b> Another sabbat replacement, really like dept&school, wife keeps her job; LAC #34
Central Ct State Univ	Organismal biology, pref. molecular or conservation	Specialty open, I could cover both fishes and herps
Gettysburg College	First-year bio, specialty open, pref. tropical or organismal	<b>Due 5 Feb!</b> Position must also support envir. studies majors; LAC #45
Jacksonville University	Marine ecology, Ichthyology	Prefers physical oceanography or marine geology experience...teaching these is a bit of a stretch; but very close to my wife’s family (a good? thing)
U New Eng	First-year bio, specialty open, pref. molecular	Large marine lab, offers aquaculture & marine bio, love the location, could do sailing

Job advertisements, including the recommendation letter addressee and a link to the department homepage follow. My updated CV is also attached.

Thankyou!  
Joel

**NOTE THAT THIS IS SHORT, WITH IMPORTANT DATES IN BOLD!**

**ADVERTISEMENTS CUT 'N' PASTED FROM THEIR JOB ADS DIRECTLY INTO A SINGLE, SUCCINCT DOCUMENT. JOBS ARE LISTED IN ORDER OF EARLIEST DEADLINE, WITH DEADLINES GIVEN IN BOLD.**

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Position: Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology

Institution: **Whitman College**

Departmental Website: <http://biology.whitman.edu/>

The Department of Biology at Whitman College invites applications for a one-year sabbatical replacement as a Visiting Assistant Professor, starting August 2004. Teaching responsibilities include the introductory courses Biological Principles (full course with lab) and The Biological World (half the course with lab, surveying the diversity of prokaryotic, algal, fungal and plant life forms), an elective for biology majors in the candidate's area of expertise (preferably plant related), and an offering for non-majors; supervision of senior thesis writing will also be expected. Preference will be given to candidates who have completed their Ph.D. Whitman College is a selective, liberal arts college of 1,400 students committed to excellence in undergraduate teaching and research. **Deadline: January 12, 2004.**

Dr. Heidi E.M. Dobson  
Biologist Search  
Department of Biology  
Whitman College  
345 Boyer Avenue  
Walla Walla WA 99362

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Position: Biologist/Assistant Professor

Institution: **Central Connecticut State University**

Departmental Website: <http://www.biology.ccsu.edu/>

Responsibilities: Teach introductory courses for majors and non-biology majors and an organism-oriented upper-level course in taxonomic group of interest for upper level undergraduate and graduate students. Develop a research program appropriate for participation of undergraduate and master's level students. Effective teaching and advising are primary expectations, as well as participation in department and university governance.

Required qualifications: Ph.D. in an area of biology. Preferred qualifications: Biologist who uses molecular, biochemical, or related techniques in the study of ecology or evolution of insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, or mammals. Teaching experience. An equivalent combination of credentials and/or experience may also be considered.

Dr. Ruth Rollin  
Chairperson, Department of Biological Sciences  
Central Connecticut State University  
1615 Stanley Street  
New Britain CT 06050

**SAMPLE SHEET THAT I INCLUDE WITHIN MY APPLICATIONS TO JOBS. THIS IS USUALLY NOT REQUESTED, BUT MANY OFFICES FIND IT HELPFUL. IT ALSO DEFINES MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE VARIOUS LETTER-WRITERS: WERE THEY A BOSS, A TEACHER, A FRIEND?**

**FINALLY, THE JOB REQUIRES 3 LETTERS, BUT NOTE THAT THERE IS A FOURTH AVAILABLE IN CASE SOMEONE'S LETTER DOES NOT MAKE IT THROUGH THE MAIL.**

## **References for Joel Carlin**

**Dr. Delbert Hutchison**, Assistant Professor LETTER MAILED  
Department of Biology  
Whitman College  
345 Boyer Avenue, Walla Walla WA 99362  
Phone: (509) 527-5135  
E-mail: hutchidw@whitman.edu  
Interests: evolutionary ecology and phylogeography of lizards in the American West  
Relationship: Last year I served as sabbatical replacement for Dr. Hutchison, who has observed my teaching of his courses.

**Dr. Daniel Vernon**, Professor, Department Chair LETTER REQUESTED  
Department of Biology  
Whitman College  
345 Boyer Avenue, Walla Walla WA 99362  
Phone: (509) 527-  
E-mail: vernondm@whitman.edu  
Interests: molecular mechanisms underlying plant embryogenesis  
Relationship: I co-taught genetics with Dr. Vernon for two semesters; we are currently examining the evolution of the PPR gene family in *Arabidopsis*.

**Dr. -----**, Associate Professor LETTER REQUESTED  
Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences  
University of Florida  
-----, Gainesville FL 32653  
Phone: -----  
E-mail: -----  
Interests: marine and behavioral ecology of groupers and crustaceans; artificial reefs  
Relationship: Dr. ----- served as supervisory committee chair for my doctoral program.

**Dr. Keith Farrington**, Professor AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST  
Director, Center for Teaching and Learning  
Department of Sociology  
Whitman College  
345 Boyer Avenue, Walla Walla WA 99362  
Phone: (509) 527-  
E-mail: farrinmk@whitman.edu  
Interests: undergraduate education methodology, sociology of criminality and deviance  
Relationship: Dr. Farrington belongs to my teaching network at Whitman, and at my request has observed me teaching three different courses in Spring 2004.