

The Ask Kit: Requesting a Letter of Recommendation

Scripts, timing, and the recommender packet. Free to copy, print, and share.

Two moments, not one. The letters themselves are written in senior year, timed to real deadlines. The smart move earlier is simply the **reservation**: a short ask in late junior spring (if your school's process allows) or the first two weeks of senior year, because popular teachers cap how many letters they write. **And one firm rule: the student does the asking, in person.** Teachers notice immediately when a parent emails instead. The parent's job is everything around the ask: the packet, the deadlines, the follow-up.

Step 1: The Reservation (Short and In Person)

Nothing is needed yet except the question. After class or during a free period:

"Hi Ms. Rivera. I'm applying to colleges and scholarships this fall, and your class is where I did some of my best work. Would you be willing to write me a letter of recommendation when the season starts? I'll bring you everything you need, including my brag sheet and all the deadlines, well before anything is due."

- **If they hesitate, treat it as a no.** Thank them warmly and ask someone else. A lukewarm letter reads as lukewarm, and readers can tell.
- **Reserve two academic recommenders** (plus the counselor, who usually writes a separate school letter), and note who scholarships might want: a coach, employer, or community leader.

Step 2: The Senior-Fall Follow-Up (Email, With the Packet)

Send 2 to 4 weeks before the earliest deadline. Attach the brag sheet.

Subject: Recommendation letter: materials and deadlines

"Dear Ms. Rivera,

Thank you again for agreeing to write my recommendation. Attached is my brag sheet, and here is everything in one place:

- *Colleges/scholarships and their deadlines: [list, earliest first]*
 - *How each is submitted: [Common App / Naviance / email / portal link]*
 - *The type of each award and what it values: [e.g. leadership scholarship; service award; STEM merit; honors program]*
- If it's useful, the moment I'd love the letter to mention is [one specific moment from their class]. Thank you so much for your time.*

[Student name and phone number]"

The Community or Employer Version (Scholarships)

Coaches, employers, pastors, and program leaders are often ideal for scholarship letters. They know the process less well, so the packet matters even more.

*"Dear Coach Daniels,
I'm applying for the [scholarship name], which asks for a letter from someone who has seen my [leadership / work ethic / service] firsthand. Working with you at [team/job/organization] has been a big part of my growth, and I'd be honored if you would write it. I've attached a one-page summary of my activities, plus exactly what the scholarship asks for and how to submit it by [date]. I'm happy to answer anything that would help. Thank you for considering it."*

How It Actually Works (Colleges)

- **1. Ask, and confirm the email address.** The teacher agrees and tells the student which email to use. A one-letter typo means the request silently goes nowhere.
- **2. Enter the teacher in the portal.** Usually the Common App; some high schools route requests through Naviance or SCOIR instead, so follow the counselor's instructions.
- **3. The portal emails the teacher a secure upload link.** These automated requests sometimes land in spam, one more reason to confirm receipt.
- **4. The teacher writes and uploads the letter.** On the Common App, one letter typically covers every college that teacher is assigned to.
- **5. The student sees status only, never the letter.** "Received" in the portal is the line to watch on the tracker. Scholarships vary: portal invite, direct email, or occasionally a signed letter, so note the method per program.

The Recommender Packet: One Clean Handoff

- **The brag sheet** (one curated page): the single biggest upgrade to letter quality.
- **The deadline list**, earliest first, with how each letter is submitted.
- **The type of each award, plus one line on what it values.** A recommender who knows it's a leadership scholarship tells a different story than one writing for a service award. Only the student can supply that steer.
- **One specific moment** the student hopes the letter might mention. Recommenders consistently use these.

Timing Rules That Protect Everyone

- **2 to 4 weeks minimum** before the earliest deadline; more for major scholarships.
- **One reminder, one week out**, short and grateful: "Just a friendly reminder that the [program] letter is due [date]. Thank you again!"
- **Confirm receipt in each portal.** "Sent" is not "received." A missing letter quietly sinks an otherwise complete application.
- **The FERPA box: waive it.** Applications ask whether the student waives the right to read the letter. Waiving signals the letter is candid, and readers trust waived letters more. Choose recommenders you'd trust unread.

Free Resources: No Account, No Cost, No Data Collection

Full recommendation guide for parents	collegereadyparent.org/reference-request-kit
Brag sheet builder (the heart of the packet)	collegereadyparent.org/brag-sheet-builder
9th-12th grade planning checklists	collegereadyparent.org/checklists

Produced by CollegeReadyParent.org, an independent, parent-built resource. No paywall, no accounts, no lead forms, no student data collection. Sources are cited on every scholarship and state aid page.

Counselors and educators: you may freely copy, print, and distribute this sheet. Questions or corrections: leo@collegereadyparent.org

Recommendation processes and requirements vary by school, college, and scholarship. Always confirm the process with your school counselor and each program before deadlines.