

### Advice to be given to the applicant's mentors for writing reference letters

Most institutions will require at least three letters of reference. The letters have to be on the referees' professional letterheads and should be signed. These letters are confidential and the referees will be required to submit their letters directly to the admissions office, either through email or by uploading via a web link. The applicants will not have access to these letters. Any letters submitted by the applicant himself/herself will not be acceptable.

The letters of reference should specifically address your potential for a successful research career. A good letter is highly personal in nature, which exhibits the referee's familiarity with the candidate and features his/her personal, academic, research, and intellectual attributes. Generic letters or ones that simply say that, for example, the student took my class and got an A, are unhelpful. As a general rule of thumb, if a professor wouldn't be able to recall your name if you met him/her in the corridor, he/she is not a good referee to write a letter on your behalf. Ideally, the best referees would be your undergraduate academic advisor and undergraduate research mentor.

A good reference letter takes time to write. You should contact your referees at least one month in advance of the deadline and provide them all the information that would help them write the best letter that they can. Also, provide them clear guidelines about the letter submission (email address or web link), and the deadline for submission.