



Letter of Recommendation General FAQ

WHO SHOULD I CHOOSE AS RECOMMENDERS?

You should choose individuals who know you and can directly address your candidacy for admission to HGSE. Ideally, your recommenders would include individuals from both academic and professional settings. Letter writers cannot be family members and should not be personal friends.

If it has been several years since you last took an academic course, you may have all three recommendations come from professional contexts.

WHAT FACTORS SHOULD I TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN ASKING AN INDIVIDUAL TO BE A RECOMMENDER?

We suggest having a conversation with your potential recommenders before officially listing them on your application to confirm that they are willing and able to support your candidacy. You will want to ask them far enough in advance that they have sufficient time to write you a strong letter of recommendation. Additionally, should they be unable to write a letter, you will want to give yourself enough time to find an alternative recommender.

Depending on your relationship with each recommender, you may want to provide them with additional context, including your reasons for pursuing graduate study. It is also appropriate to give them a copy of your resume or a draft of your statement of purpose, so they have additional insights into your accomplishments and goals.

AM I ABLE TO CHANGE RECOMMENDERS ONCE I HAVE ENTERED THEM IN MY APPLICATION?

No, we are unable to facilitate changing recommenders once you have entered them in the Recommendations section of your application. Please think carefully and thoughtfully about who you would like to serve as your recommenders before adding them to your application.

HOW DO MY RECOMMENDERS SUBMIT THEIR LETTERS?

Once you enter your recommender's information in the application system, an automatic email will be sent to them with instructions for submitting their letter via our online system. However, it is good practice to proactively communicate submission deadlines with your recommender.

If your recommender does not see our email in their inbox, please be sure to have them check their spam/junk folders. The email will be sent from gseadmissions@harvard.edu.

WHEN IS THE DEADLINE FOR MY RECOMMENDERS TO SUBMIT THEIR LETTERS?

All letters of recommendation must be received by the application deadline of the program to which you are applying. Deadlines for all programs can be found on our How to Apply webpage.

CAN I HELP MY RECOMMENDER WITH THE WRITING PROCESS?

You cannot be involved in any way in the drafting, writing, or submitting of your recommendation letters. Writing a first draft of a letter to give to your recommender is not allowed. However, you may provide a resume or summary of your accomplishments to your recommender to use for contextual information; you may also provide them with a copy of your Statement of Purpose.

Please remember that in the application, you will be required to electronically sign a statement confirming that you had no participation in the drafting or submission of your recommendation letter. Note that the HGSE Admissions Office may follow up with recommenders as needed for additional information.

MY RECOMMENDER CANNOT SUBMIT THEIR LETTER ON THEIR OWN. CAN I ASSIST THEM?

No, you cannot help your recommender submit your own letter. If your recommender would benefit from having someone walk through the uploading and submission process, they can ask for assistance from anyone else aside from yourself. This might be a colleague, an assistant, or a family member. If your recommender is having technical trouble, you can direct them to contact our office.

MY RECOMMENDER DOES NOT SPEAK ENGLISH. CAN THEY STILL SUBMIT A LETTER?

If one of your recommenders is planning to submit a letter written in a language other than English, your recommender is also responsible for submitting a certified, literal (word-for-word) translation. The recommender will need to upload both documents: the original non-English letter and the certified translation. The applicant must not be involved in either the translation or the uploading of documents.

MY RECOMMENDER HAS NOT RECEIVED THE NOTIFICATION EMAIL. HOW DO I RESEND IT TO THEM?

You can resend the recommender notification email to each of your recommendation providers by going to the Recommendations section of your application, clicking the name of your recommender, and selecting "Send Reminder."

If you have already submitted your application, you can still send a reminder to your recommenders. To do so, log back into your application and scroll to the bottom of the Application Status Page, where you will find a link to the Recommendations page. Follow the instructions provided above to resend the notification email to your recommenders.

If you have resent the email but your recommender has still not received it, please check to ensure that you have entered their email address correctly. You should also ask your recommender to check their spam or junk folder for an email from Harvard Graduate School of Education. If you have done this and your recommender still has not received the email, please email us at gseadmissions@harvard.edu for assistance.

CAN I SUBMIT MY APPLICATION BEFORE MY RECOMMENDERS HAVE SUBMITTED THEIR LETTERS?

Yes, if you have entered the names and contact information of your referees and if the other portions of your application are complete, you may submit your online application. Your recommenders will still be able to submit their letters via the online submission portal after you have submitted.

CAN I USE INTERFOLIO TO SUBMIT MY LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION?

No, Interfolio is not compatible with HGSE's online system. Recommenders must submit their letters directly using our online recommendation system. Please remember that letters written specifically for your HGSE degree application tend to be stronger than letters written for general use purpose.

CAN I SUBMIT MORE THAN THREE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION?

No, the application only allows three recommendations, and we will not accept or review additional materials from a fourth recommender.

WHAT IF MY RECOMMENDER CAN NO LONGER WRITE MY LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION?

If your recommender is no longer able or willing to write your letter, please ask them email gseadmissions@harvard.edu confirming their need to withdraw.

FERPA FAQ

WHAT IS FERPA? HOW DOES IT IMPACT MY LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 (Buckley Amendment) allows you to access your educational records if you are admitted and decide to enroll at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. If you enroll at HGSE, your educational records would generally include information like your enrollment status, grades, and your admissions records – including letters of recommendation submitted on your behalf. More information about FERPA can be found on the U.S. Department of Education website.

If you decide to waive your right to access the letter of recommendation, this means that you will not be able to access your recommender's letter in your educational records at HGSE. However, if you choose to not waive your right, then you will have access to your letter if you enroll at HGSE.

WHAT FACTORS SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT TO WAIVE MY RIGHT?

We strongly encourage you to discuss whether or not to waive your rights with any potential recommender prior to including them in your application. Some recommenders may feel more comfortable providing a candid and truthful letter of recommendation if you waive your right to access the letter, because they will know that their letter will remain confidential. In some instances, a recommender may refuse to write a letter on your behalf unless you waive your access rights.

WILL MY RECOMMENDER BE ABLE TO SEE IF I AM WAIVING MY RIGHTS TO VIEW MY LETTER?

Yes, your recommender will be able to see whether or not you have chosen to waive your right to access your letter of recommendation. Your recommender should be aware if you will not be waiving your right and thus will have access to the letter if you are admitted. The admissions committee will also be able to see this information and take it into account when reviewing your letters of recommendation.

WILL I BE ABLE TO CHANGE MY DECISION ABOUT WAIVING MY RIGHTS AFTER I HAVE ENTERED MY RECOMMENDER IN THE APPLICATION?

No, upon sending your recommender request, you will no longer be able to change your decision about whether to waive your right.