

Sandy Alexander's thoughts about recommendation letters for law school (4/16/12)

- How Many:** 2 or 3; two academic mandatory, and one non-academic if desired.
- Who:** Academic letters from professors, not grad students.
Grad students can facilitate and contribute to letters from professors.
- When:** One month in advance. That's good manners.
People will agree to many things if you ask far enough in advance.
- Addresses:** Provide envelopes addressed to LSAC and to Lowell.
Always waive your right to see recommendation letters.
- How To Ask:** Asking for a recommendation is a two-way exchange of information.

Information you get: whether they can write a *strong* letter

Be clear about what you are asking. You are not trying to find out whether they will write a letter. Instead, you are trying to find out whether they can write a *strong* letter.

When they say yes, you want them to have in mind at that moment some of the substance that will make the letter *strong*.

The moment when you ask for the letter is your one legitimate chance to find out whether it will be *strong*.

There is an accepted, formulaic method (like in the State of the Union): "Could you write a *strong* letter recommending me for law school?" You can do this in writing if you want.

Information you give: a carefully prepared package that helps the writer, including: your resume, personal statement, a summary of your relationship with the writer, and examples of work you did for the writer (e.g., papers).

Meet in person with your writers, even if you must travel to do so.

Why This Matters: Short term goal: admission / long term goal: get adopted by mentors

Many of you will get into law school. Some of you will keep two or three mentors as lifelong friends.

Use recommendation slots to anoint people as your godparents. Make a relationship out of it. Write them each semester. Visit them each year.

This is a kind of sharing.

Near the end of March, 1845, I borrowed an axe and went down by the woods near Walden Pond, nearest to where I intended to build my house, and began to cut down some tall, arrowy white pines, still in their youth, for timber. It is difficult to begin without borrowing, but perhaps it is the most generous course thus to permit your fellow-men to have an interest in your enterprise.