Reference request emails

Three emails to ask a professor or manager for an academic reference: the first request, a reminder and a thank-you, plus a short result update. Edit them so they sound like you.

When to ask and what to send

- **Our advice: ask at least four weeks before your first deadline,** and earlier if the deadline falls in an exam period or a holiday.
- **Ask people who know your work:** a thesis supervisor, a professor whose course you did well in, a manager who saw your results.
- **Ask before you enter their email in a portal.** If the portal emails the referee straight away, the request should not be the first they hear of it.
- **Send everything in one email,** so the referee has what they need in one place.

Attach to the first email

- [ ] Your CV
- [ ] Your draft statement of purpose or motivation letter
- [ ] Your transcript
- [ ] A list of the programmes and scholarships, with each deadline and how each letter is submitted
- [ ] Two or three points you hope the letter covers, for example the project you did in their course

Before you ask

Choose your referees

- Pick one backup referee too, in case someone cannot write in time.
- Read what each programme asks: how many referees, academic or professional, and whether they submit through the portal.

What else your referee needs (add it to your first email)

- The programme's name and why you are applying, in three lines.
- Two or three things you would like them to mention, with examples (a project, a grade, a task you led).
- The deadline, in their time zone, and how they submit (portal link or email).
- Their own deadline, if the programme gives referees a different date from yours.

The email that gets lost

Portals send referees an automatic email with the upload link. Ask your referee to check the junk or spam folder, and tell them the sender name to look for. Some portals ask for an institutional email address (a university or company address) rather than a free one; check the portal before you enter your referee's address.

If a referee is slow

Send the reminder (Email 2) about a week before the deadline, and only if the portal shows the letter as not yet received. If there is no answer three days before the deadline, ask your backup referee, if the portal lets you change referees.

Email 1: first request

Subject: Reference request: [programme or scholarship], first deadline [date]

Dear [Professor or Dr] [Surname],

I am applying for [degree and programme] at [university], and for [scholarship name, or delete], and I would like to ask whether you could write a reference for me.

You taught me in [course] in [year], where I [what you did, e.g. wrote my project on X and received Y]. I believe you can speak to my [skill or quality].

The first deadline is [date]. The letters are submitted [through a link the university will email you / by email to address]. I have attached

my CV, draft statement, transcript and a list of the applications with their deadlines.

If you are able to support me, I will enter your details in the portal on [date]. If this is not a good time, I understand.

Thank you for considering my request.

Kind regards,

[Full name]

[Student ID, programme and graduation year]

[Phone]

Email 2: reminder

> Our timing: send it about one week before the deadline, and only if the portal shows the letter as not yet received.

Subject: Reminder: reference for [programme], due [date]

Dear [Professor or Dr] [Surname],

This is a short reminder that the reference for [programme] at [university] is due on [date, time and time zone]. The link was sent to [email] on [date]. I can ask the university to resend it if that helps.

Thank you again for your support.

Kind regards,

[Full name]

Email 3: thank-you

Send it once the letter is submitted, then write again when you hear the result.

Subject: Thank you for your reference

Dear [Professor or Dr] [Surname],

Thank you for writing my reference for [programme]. My application is now complete, and I will let you know the result as soon as I hear.

Kind regards,

[Full name]

Result update

Subject: News about [programme]

Dear [Professor or Dr] [Surname],

I have been offered a place on [programme] at [university] [and the scholarship, if awarded]. Thank you for your part in this. I start in [month and year].

Kind regards,

[Full name]

Free on ScholarMENA

- How many referees each scholarship asks for, and when (with checked dates): scholarmena.com/guides/scholarship-reference-letters/
- Academic CV template: scholarmena.com/resources/templates/academic-cv-template/

Sources

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