

Leah Carroll's addendum regarding online recommendations

Although online applications may present some time savings for the applicant, they present new challenges for the recommender and require the requester of recommendations to take some extra steps. Based on my experience with online recommendations, here are some good practices to follow:

1) Create a neatly organized packet electronically as a guide so the recommender has the big picture and has some hopes of doing all of your recommendations in one sitting (the most efficient way to do it). If you apply to 10 schools, your recommender will receive up to 30 e-mails regarding your application process (mixed in with many other similar e-mails for other people for whom your recommender is writing letters). Therefore, make sure one of the attachments you send your recommender -- labeled "instructions" or something along that line -- has a chronological list -- or better yet, a spreadsheet—that includes:

- the exact name of each program and university, e.g. Cultural anthropology, Archeology, etc. (Believe it or not, the links sent to recommenders never include the deadline and often omit the name of the program!)
- which recommendations are due when;
- logistics of recommendation delivery: online? If so, date the link was sent (to facilitate mailbox searches); paper? If so, will I mail it directly to the university (at what address?), or will you pick up a signed/sealed copy?;
- what attracts you about each particular program you are applying to (so the letter writer can do some "customization" of each letter).
- If the program especially seeks applicants with particular characteristics (such as linguistic geniuses, or "people people", or hardy, resourceful, experienced researchers), let me know so I can touch on that in my letter.
- Other useful information to include is a transcript, as well as notes on who the other recommenders are and what they might focus on in their letters. This allows the recommender to know their place in the "division of labor", e.g., Professor X would know that they are the only one who has seen you do a public presentation, for example.

2) Send everything at once to the recommender, so the recommender does not have to put together all the different pieces from many different emails spread out over several weeks.

3) Regarding timing: graduate applications are overwhelmingly due in December or January. Remember that for a professor who will be away from mid-December until the start of classes (as most are), a recommendation due January 1 or 8 or 15 is virtually the same as one due December 15 and will need to be done before s/he leaves campus for break. So, the polite thing is to get everything to the recommenders around December 1.