

A Brookie Guide to Requesting a Letter of Recommendation

Version 3: Updated for the Class of 2024

If you've never asked for a Letter of Recommendation before, it might seem like a strange, intimidating, and potentially awkward thing to do. Many of us don't feel comfortable asking for praise — and that's often particularly true for people in underserved communities. But don't worry: there are good people in the world, and good people like to help other good people succeed. Many times, you'll find that the folks you ask to write you a letter of recommendation are downright thrilled to hear that you've found something that inspires you and are happy to help you along your journey.

The application to be a Brooke Owens Fellow requires two Letters of Recommendation:

- One letter that focuses on your **achievements, skills, and potential in achievement-oriented settings** like jobs, classes, labs, certain clubs or extracurricular activities, and more.
- One letter that focuses on your **character, creativity, and consistency in service-oriented settings** like clubs, religious groups, family groups, and more.

This document will give you some practical tips on how to go about getting accurate and impressive Letters of Recommendation — whether it's for our program or for anything else.

Deciding Who to Ask

The people you ask to write you Letters of Recommendation should be people who have had the chance to get to know you as an individual sometime relatively recently.

There are exceptions to every rule, but here are some guidelines you might want to consider.

Someone who knew you really well five or ten years ago is probably not ideal. Not only have you changed as a person, but their memories of you have probably faded. Find someone who will have an impression of you that is recent and still accurate.

Someone who only interacted with you as part of a group might not know you as an individual. Even if someone was incredibly impressed by a team you were on or a group you were in, they may not know your personal contributions — and even glowing letters that only

talk about groups are not nearly as effective as letters that get specific about your skills and your character.

Fame doesn't matter (at least not for our program)... but experience can. Not every program is like this, but here at the Brooke Owens Fellowship, we aren't swayed by letters written by famous people or by people from well-known companies / teams / projects any more than any other. We all know that access to famous people is not equally available to all, and fame bias is just another form of bias. However, there can be a benefit to getting letters from people who are more experienced in their field, whatever that field may be. If a letter writer tells us that you are the most impressive student / employee / person they have worked with in a 40-year career, that tells us something that no letter from a first-year teacher (or coach, or ...) could. So, don't chase fame — but do think about letter writers with perspective.

Your letter writers don't have to come from aerospace ... but their interactions with you should have some relevance to your application. We've gotten insanely awesome Letters of Recommendation from sports team coaches, fellow students, religious clergy, and more. Those letters were extremely helpful because they taught us more about specific attributes or experiences of a candidate that were particularly relevant to their ability to succeed in our industry — their work ethic, their creativity, their resourcefulness, their passion, their commitment to service — even though the letter authors themselves had nothing to do with this industry.

Effectively Asking

If you learn only one thing from this guide, let it be this:

Ask early. As early as possible. If you ask for a Letter of Recommendation the day before the deadline, you might get it... but it won't be as strong as it could have been. The sooner you ask, the more likely they are to say yes — and the better their letter will probably be.

Seriously, you'd be surprised how many people ask at the last minute. And hey, we've all been there — if you need to, you need to. But it's better not to need to, right?

Okay, beyond that, here are some other tips.

Ask if they'd like you to send reminders as the deadline approaches. A handful of letter writers might find this annoying, but most will be extremely grateful for gentle reminders, especially within a week or two of the deadline.

Tell them what you are applying for — and why. Don't assume they already know about the Brooke Owens Fellowship. Give them a brief description of the program, and offer to provide

them with more information by email, phone, or videoconference if they'd like. Don't make them do a ton of research before they even start writing your letter. And don't be afraid to share a little bit about why you think this program would be a great fit for you or a great step on your career path.

If it's been a while, gently remind them of who you are and how they know you. This can be effectively done in discussing why you are asking them specifically to write the letter. Telling them "I've never forgotten what you told me about ...," "it helped my career more than you can imagine when you..." or "it made a huge impression on me when you..." may jog their memory of specific interactions they had with you.

Tell them what the letter should focus on. If this seems awkward, don't worry; you can blame it on us! Tell them our application requires a specific focus (and be sure to tell them which of the two areas of focus you are asking them specifically to write about!).

Give them the logistical information. The only thing that your recommender needs to do is upload their letter using the link sent to their email by Survey Monkey. You can also refer them to this document [How to Recommend with Survey Monkey](#). You want all of their brainpower focused on writing you the best damn letter they can. When you ask for the letter, send them all these details in a condensed format.

Don't send them a pre-written letter ... but don't be shocked if they ask you to help them write the letter. Yes, these are both things that happen, pretty often. Depending on your relationship with the person, you could offer to send some bullet points about you or your resume to help jog their memory of your accomplishments. Sometimes, they may ask you to send them an entire draft of the letter for them to edit or simply endorse. But don't just send along a pre-written letter in your first message.

Not everyone is available to write a good letter of recommendation, so allow them to say no. Use your judgment based on your relationship with the person, but a wishy-washy response may mean they don't think they are able to write you a killer letter right now — which could mean that they are busy, or that they don't think they are good at writing letters, or any of a million other things. You don't want to push to convince them to write the letter if they are lukewarm on the idea. Most Letters of Recommendation we receive fall somewhere in between "positive" and "glowing," which means a neutral-sounding Letter of Recommendation can be really harmful to your application relative to your peers. Feel free to ask your letter writers if they are comfortable or have the time available to write the letter, giving them a chance to say no if they may be constrained or concerned about writing it.

Following Up

This relationship doesn't end the moment they submit their Letter of Recommendation. A little follow-up can help you down the road — and it may also help others!

Thank you notes are always appreciated. They are taking the time to write this letter not for their own benefit, but for your future success. A thank you shows that you are grateful for their time and energy. And who doesn't want to be appreciated? Whether it's an email or a handwritten note, if you send a thank you to your letter writers, they will notice, appreciate, and remember that.

When you find out if you've gotten into the program, let them know. If you didn't get in but plan to apply again next year, you may want to tell them — they might have suggestions on how you could improve your application, or they may proactively offer to write you a Letter of Recommendation again next year. If you got in, you should probably thank them again. And you may want to email them again later on — update them about your journey and its details and recognize you couldn't have gotten here without their help. They may want to share in your successes and your email may prompt them to suggest the program to future applicants!

Other Resources

Still hungry for more information? In addition to talking to your school's guidance or careers offices, you might want to check out these links.

Khan Academy on [Requesting Letters of Recommendation](#)

WikiHow's [step-by-step guide](#).

Business school professor and best-selling author Adam Grant's guide on [How Not to Ask for a Recommendation Letter](#)

A Brookie Guide to Writing a Letter of Recommendation

You are reading this guide because you said yes to writing a recommendation letter to this awesome person that you know well, who is applying to the Brooke Owens Fellowship! So now what? Let's get you started on how to help your awesome person #BecomeABrookie. In this guide, you will find information about the fellowship, the types of information we're hoping to learn about the awesome applicant you know, some suggestions and guidelines for the content and structure of the letter, how to submit the letter, and a couple of additional resources.

Background for the Letter

The first thing you need to know before you start your letter is to understand the program your awesome person is applying to.

The Brooke Owens Fellowship honors the legacy of a beloved space industry pioneer and accomplished pilot, Dawn Brooke Owens (1980 – 2016), created in 2017 by three of Brooke's closest friends and supported by an incredible community of individuals and organizations. The program is designed to serve both as an inspiration and as a career boost to capable young women and other gender minorities (like your awesome person) who, like Brooke, aspire to explore our sky and stars, shake up the aerospace industry, and to help their fellow people here on planet Earth.

We match about forty students per year with purpose-driven, paid internships at leading aerospace companies and organizations and with senior and executive-level mentors. Your awesome person is reaching out to you because they want to be a part of this pool of young leaders, and show us that they have what it takes to work at cool aerospace companies, do meaningful work, and launch themselves to the career of their dreams.

Learning About the Applicant

We are really looking forward to getting to know an applicant to identify the best possible candidates from all backgrounds to join the Brooke Owens Fellowship. As a result, students go through a unique set of requirements to apply to the program, which includes [writing original essays and creating a multimedia piece](#) on their professional interests, personal character, and

community mindset. However, we can only gain so much about a student from how they present themselves.

We ask for letters of recommendation because we want your perspective as well to learn who our candidates are, how we might be able to support them, and what they might contribute to one of our Host Institutions. Our requirements for the recommendation letters may be different from what you have seen before because we ask for very specific traits of fellows, or as we call them “Brookies”, that we believe can give us a deeper understanding of who the applicant really is from these prompts.

You may have been asked to write a recommendation letter for one of the following prompts:

- One letter that focuses on your **achievements, skills, and potential in achievement-oriented settings** like jobs, classes, labs, certain clubs or extracurricular activities, and more.
- One letter that focuses on your **character, creativity, and consistency in service-oriented settings** like clubs, religious groups, family groups, and more.

For the **achievements, skills, and potential in achievement-oriented settings** prompt, we want to see your perspective on how the applicant is an achievement-oriented person and the technical and soft skills that they have. There is no restriction on who is answering this prompt, but you might be the applicant’s job supervisor, teaching assistant, professor, club advisor, research collaborator, peer, etc. To answer this prompt, you may want to consider the questions below. These are by no means restrictions on what you can write, but ideas that can help you figure out how to shape your letter!

- How has the applicant used their technical skills to solve difficult problems they have faced?
- What fuels the applicant throughout their academic and professional career to be achievement-oriented?
- When has the applicant gone above and beyond with applying their individual skills and been able to achieve incredible results?
- How has the applicant shown tenacity and resilience and where will that take them next?
- What traits does the applicant have that makes them stand out and a valuable asset to the aerospace community?

For the **character, creativity, and consistency in service-oriented settings** prompt, we want to see your perspective on the applicant as a person through their character, creativity, and consistency in their communities. Similarly, there is no restriction on who you are that is answering this prompt, but you might be the applicant’s club advisor, religious group member, family member, classmate, project team member, etc. To answer this prompt, you may want to consider the questions below. Again, these are by no means restrictions on what you can write, but ideas that can help you figure out how to shape your letter!

- When things get extra busy and hectic, how much time and energy does the applicant dedicate to their community?
- What is one of the most creative ways you have seen the applicant solve a problem in their community?
- How does the applicant reflect and act upon receiving constructive feedback?
- What act of selflessness have you witnessed the applicant do that really impressed you?
- What traits does the applicant have that makes them stand out and a valuable asset to the aerospace community?

Structure of the Letter

There is no page requirement for the letter, but recommendation letters are typically 1 to 2 pages long. Although there is no one-size-fits-all format for the recommendation letter that the Brooke Owens Fellowship is looking for, here are some tips in case you're stuck!

Beginning of the Letter

- Start the letter by addressing to the "Brooke Owens Fellowship"
- Introduce who this recommendation letter is for
- Introduce yourself and how you know the applicant you are writing for

Middle of the Letter

- Expand on your interactions with the applicant and how well you know them
- Talk about anecdotes you have had with the applicant that address the prompt
- Consider the example questions in the previous section and try to answer them with specific moments you interacted with or witnessed the applicant show the traits asked in the prompt

End of the Letter

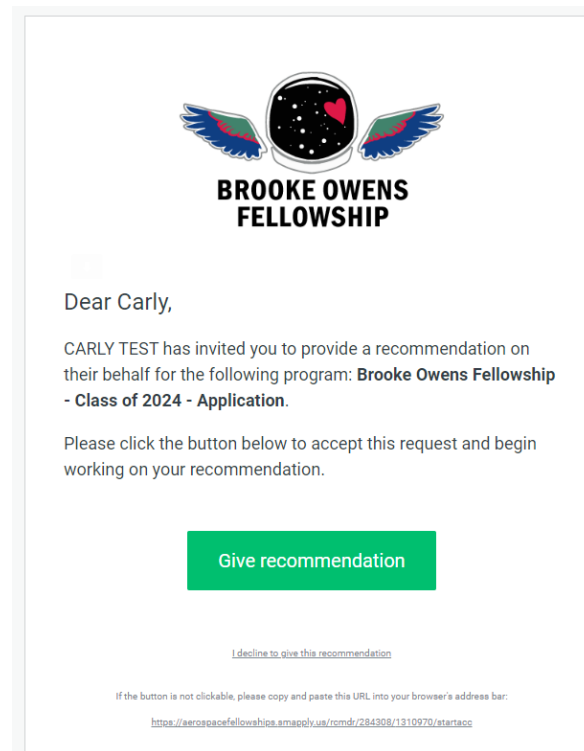
- Conclude the letter by summarizing the content and emphasizing key takeaways of the letter
- Include a closing statement that reflects on the prompt and identifies the applicant as a strong candidate for the Brooke Owens Fellowship
- Provide additional contact information
- End with a closing salutation, your signature, and printed/typed name

Submitting the Letter

Your applicant should request a letter of recommendation through Survey Monkey. If the request was made, you will receive an email from Survey Monkey with the link to submit your letter directly to the portal.

The email from Survey Monkey will look like this. Click the **green 'Give recommendation' button** to submit your letter of recommendation. If you would like to decline, please click the **underlined fine print under the green button that says 'I decline to give this recommendation'**.

If you do not see an email like this in your inbox, please check your spam folder or trash for an email from noreply@mail.smapply.net



The letters of recommendation should be submitted by the application deadline, **October 7th**, listed at <https://brookeowensfellowship.org/apply>.

Other Resources

Still hungry for more information? Here are some other links you might want to check out.

The Balance Careers on [Writing a Personal Recommendation Letter](#)

Indeed.com's [How to Write a Letter of Recommendation](#)