

My Policy on Letters of Recommendation/Reference

Dr. Alexander Lanoszka

University of Waterloo

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The following applies less to strong students who have an established working relationship with me and more to those who have had limited face-time with, and/or received little supervision from, me. That said, some technical guidelines are universally applicable since letter writing takes time and engages my reputation among my colleagues at other universities.

These guidelines serve to increase efficiency so that I can focus on letter writing rather than on tedious administrative tasks. None of them are negotiable.

Major Conditions

- If you were enrolled in my PSCI 150 course, then you might not receive a detailed personalised letter given its relatively high enrolment numbers.
- If you did less than well in my module (< **B**), then I urge you to have a letter written by someone else for whom you have performed better. I will not reward mediocre performances with my time devoted to writing letters.
- I need a minimum **two** weeks' notice. I cannot write letters on a whim. Most programs ask letter writers to evaluate the student's abilities and maturity level—writing up such an evaluation takes time.
- You need to have my express permission before you can use me as a reference. Absolutely do not list me as a reference without consulting me first. To do so is presumptuous and even unfair to other students who go through the correct procedures. It is also coercive and virtually guarantees that your letter will not be good.
- You will need to provide me with your CV, personal/research statement, and strongest writing sample. Failure to provide me with these materials will make it harder for me to write the best evaluation possible on your behalf.
- Be sure to send me all the materials and all the requests at once. It is easier this way and reduces the likelihood of anything being lost or forgotten.
- You will need my express consent for you to list my name on your CV.

Other Conditions

- You will complete the factual parts of any required forms to the best extent possible. These factual parts include my name, address, institutional affiliation, contact information, etc. Use the rank that I have according to the official university record (as of 2018, assistant professor). Make sure your information is correct—all the details can be found on my personal website at www.alexlanoszka.com. Failure to provide correct factual information creates additional work for me and will surely irritate me.
- I will only write eight letters for you in a given year because each one takes time.
- I will not fax letters on your behalf. That takes up too much time. If you go about your applications in haste, then it is evidence that you do not care that much about them. As such, why should I?
- Most recommendations are now done online. If the program asks for letters to be sent via regular post, then please provide me with a pre-addressed envelope. I will not be spending time looking for the address of whatever program to which you are applying.
- You will provide me with a typed list of **five** words or short phrases that describe what you think are your distinctive strengths—things that you believe I have seen and application committees would like to see. Supply at least **one** anecdote to the best extent possible (e.g., classroom discussion participation, an assignment for me in which you excelled, etc.).
- You will write me an email to remind me **four** days in advance of the application deadline that I need to dispatch your letters.

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I borrowed these guidelines liberally from [Stephen M. Saideman](#)'s website, but they capture exactly how I approach letter writing.

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