Coastal Carolina University Department of Psychology
Guidelines for Obtaining Letters of Recommendation

1. **Carefully select faculty members to ask for letters.** Choose faculty members who
   - have had ample opportunity to observe your work
   - have worked closely with you as a research mentor, internship supervisor, or honor society/club advisor
   - have expertise in the area to which you are applying
   - will write a strong, positive letter emphasizing your abilities

2. **Make a face-to-face request for a letter of recommendation.** Speak with each faculty member in person to ask if he or she would be willing to write a letter on your behalf.

3. **Timing the request.** Request the letter at least four weeks (not including holidays or school breaks) before the letter should be mailed or returned to you.

4. **Materials packet.** Organize all the materials needed to complete the letters of recommendations and give them to the faculty member in a folder or an envelope. Your information packet should contain:
   - A typed information sheet which includes your name, phone number and/or e-mail address, cumulative GPA, GRE scores (if available), a list of courses taken with the faculty member (including semester taken and grades earned), and a list of graduate schools (or jobs or scholarships) to which you are applying. For each school indicate
     a. the name of the program to which you are applying, the school’s mailing address, and the
     b. name of an individual or committee to which the letter should be addressed
     c. the date by which the letter is to be mailed or returned to you
     d. whether an official form must be completed in addition to the letter
     e. whether the letter is to be returned to you or sent directly to the school
     f. other special instructions
   - **Recommendation forms.** Be sure you have completed all the information on the form that the applicant is asked to provide. If there is an item on the form asking whether you wish to waive access to the letter, answer that you **DO** waive access. This is a common courtesy to your recommender, and if you do not waive access, the readers of the letter may question the writer’s objectivity.
   - An envelope for each letter or form. If the envelope is to be returned to you, be sure you have typed your name and the name of the school on the envelope. If the envelope is to be mailed directly to the school, be sure you have typed the school’s name and address on the envelope and have placed a stamp on the envelope. Some faculty members may prefer to use their own envelopes. If this is the case, provide a typed address label for each envelope.
   - An unofficial copy of your transcript with courses you have taken from the faculty member highlighted.
   - A current copy of your resume.

5. **Check the status of your letter.** About a week before the due date, ask the faculty member if the letter has been written. If it hasn’t, remind the faculty member of the due date and ask when the letter will be sent or available for you to pick up.

6. **Send a note of thanks.** Send a handwritten note thanking each faculty member for writing a letter on your behalf. If you get into the graduate program (or get the job or scholarship), send a note or e-mail to the faculty members who wrote letters to inform them of your good news.

7. **Remember.** Faculty members are under no obligation to write letters of recommendation for you. These letters will not emphasize your grades. Screening committees can see that on your transcript. Rather, the letters will emphasize your responsibility as a student, how conscientiously you completed assignments, how well you expressed yourself in written and oral communication, how effectively you interacted with other students and faculty, whether you kept and were on time for appointments, whether you took responsibility for your own work, and so forth. You should consider these factors in determining who you ask for letters.

Additional information regarding letters of recommendation as well as general information about getting into graduate school can be found at the following websites:
   - Applying to Graduate School (APA)
   - Questions and Answers About Applying to Graduate School (Eye on Psi Chi)
   - Writing Your Own Letter of Recommendation (Eye on Psi Chi)