

STARTING A JOB FOLDER

Your dossier is one of the most important components of your application to any academic or academia -related job, so it's important to assemble as strong a collection of letters as you can. Here are some tips on how to do so.

–**Set up a folder with Interfolio.** This service costs a small amount of money, but it's a necessary expense since Fordham doesn't provide it for its students anymore. Interfolio will give you a virtual storage file to keep your dossier, from which you can send it out (wholly or in part) on demand. Visit Interfolio.com for details.

Career service dossier letters generally satisfy recommendation requirements for fellowship applications even if the applications have specific recommendation forms. So if your recommender(s) are on leave or otherwise out of commission, you can easily use your file letters to apply for fellowships.

N.B.: You should always double-check the work that Interfolio does. Confirm that letters are on file so that you can politely prompt tardy recommenders. Make sure that dossiers arrive at the destinations to which you sent them.

–**Ask for your letters as soon as possible, and in a professional way.**

“As soon as possible” means requesting a reference once you believe that you're finished working with a professor. For example, let's say that you're a Medievalist who takes a course in Victorian literature. Knowing that you're not likely to take another course in that area, you can approach the professor after the course ends (and after grades have been submitted) to ask for a letter. This is acceptable practice even if you're a couple of years away from the job market. It's advisable because the professor will have fresh, detailed memories of your work that will make your letter stronger.

Another way to get these crucial details into your recommendations is to show professionalism in your request. Here's a set of procedures for requesting a letter of recommendation:

1. Write a note asking the professor for a recommendation. If you don't get an answer within a week, call or leave a voicemail. (Or make the request in person during office hours.)
2. Once the professor agrees to write for you, you should drop off a packet containing the following:
 - * a letter to the professor detailing the purpose of the recommendation (fellowship application, job market, general purpose, etc.). Your letter should include a discussion of strengths that you hope that the professor might emphasize in the recommendation (e.g., your public speaking ability). Your recommenders have no obligation to fulfill such requests, but most will do so; they have, after all, consented to write in your support.
 - * a copy of a current cv.

- * copies (not originals!) of the work you did for your recommender. Also include copies of selected other work you did for other classes that you deem relevant, and that might strengthen the letter. The recommender may choose to address them, or maybe not. The point is that you are providing the option.
- * an addressed, stamped envelope addressed to Interfolio, or wherever. (Don't cut corners and include a university mail envelope instead; you don't know where the recommender will be sitting when she writes your letter.)
- * anything else which you think might strengthen your letter, as long as it doesn't need to be returned.

The idea is to provide your recommender with a comprehensive package that will enable her to write you a persuasive letter, print it out and seal it in the envelope you've provided, and then discard all the extra papers.

3. Give your recommender sufficient time to write. It's disrespectful to ask for a letter that is due in a week; doing so shows little regard for your recommender's schedule or time. Prepare your requests well in advance.

–**Solicit a variety of letters.** Dossiers that accompany applications to academic jobs typically contain at least four letters these days (some have many more), but different combinations of letters will make you attractive to different positions. For example, what combination of letters will work best for a research-oriented school? And in what order? Which letters sell you best to a teaching-oriented school? To an administrative position?

Treat each job application as an individual self-marketing effort. In order to display yourself best, you should have an array of letters that speak to different aspects of your work.

–Decide whether or not you want to waive your right of access to the recommendations that people write for you. This is a personal decision.

Regardless of your choice, arrange to have a faculty member you trust (in most cases, your dissertation director) read the contents of your dossier and discuss the letters with you before you actually send in your job applications. (There's nothing wrong with getting a second opinion if you wish.) Your adviser will help you select certain letters for certain types of jobs.

Any suggestions for additions to this tip list? Contact the English Department Graduate Program's former Director of Placement & Professional Development, Lenny Cassuto, at lcassuto@erols.com.