Requesting Letters of Recommendation

This is a frequent necessity, whether it’s for a job, a scholarship, grad school, or something else. It is extremely important to remember that this is a *large* favor you are asking of someone: writing a good letter of recommendation can take at least an hour, sometimes several, and usually faculty members let them sit for a few days, then revise them.

* If at all possible, give faculty members three to four weeks’ notice, two at a minimum. For your first letter ever, this is *essential*: the faculty member has not written for you before and will have no letter that s/he can change out scholarship names and hand to you.
* Always follow up! Email the faculty member a week before the letter is due to remind them and then confirm once again the day before the letter is due that it has been mailed/delivered. Remember, professors are busy people, just like you! The notice given is a sign of respect, and the follow-ups a recognition that with lives spent on research and teaching, sometimes we all need a reminder.
* Request a letter of recommendation in person whenever possible, at least for the first letter from that faculty member. As you establish a relationship with a professor, asking for letters via email may be easier.
* When you go to the faculty member’s office to request the letter, bring a copy of your resume and a description of what the letter might cover. Sometimes, scholarships will send letter-writers an email detailing what they need to cover in a letter, in which case you can simply register the faculty member online. If you have to write a personal statement or cover letter, it may be a good idea to bring a copy of that as well.
* If your scholarship requires a form, make sure you’ve already filled out the form before even requesting a faculty member’s support in a letter.
* Follow up with the faculty member and let s/he know how you did, whether you got the internship/scholarship/job or not. Faculty members invest themselves in your application, and deserve to share a part in your success!
* ALWAYS write a thank you note or email acknowledging the time spent and your appreciation of the faculty member’s assistance and support. If their letter sends you somewhere (for instance, studying abroad) a postcard is a good idea, and/or a gift, particularly if the faculty member has written for you many times.