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| CAREER CRUISER | Asking for a Reference, Recommendation, or Endorsement |

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| **Step 5** | Prepare for your chosen career. |
| **Driving Question** | How can I show employers social proof of my competence and character? |
| **Goal** | Request a reference letter, letter of recommendation or an online professional endorsement. |
| **Standard** | Demonstrate mastery of the career navigation skills necessary to obtain, retain, advance within, and switch employment. (CR.3.3) |

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| **FOR TEACHERS** |

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| **Timeframe** | 1 to 2 roughly hour-long lessons. |
| **Materials** | Lesson can be completed online and actually involve having students email potential recommenders or the lesson can be completed with no digital device access and students can brainstorm or write on paper. |
| **Overview** | **Beginning*** Show students data from research showing that social capital is measurably able to lift people from poverty.

**Middle*** Define social capital, letter of recommendation, reference letter, and online endorsement.
* Have students identify what form of documentation they will seek (letter of recommendation, reference letter, or endorsement – depends on whether the student wants this for college application, current job application or possible future opportunity).
* Students will brainstorm a list of people they could ask and then make a plan to ask and support the writer appropriately.

**End*** Discuss in pairs or as a class what type of qualities/abilities/accomplishments documentation they will request, who they will ask, and why they will ask that person.

**Extension*** Have the students present the results of their research on how people within their chosen career field network to increase and strengthen their work-related relationships. The presentation can be through PowerPoint, a display board or other means.
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| **FOR STUDENTS** |

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| **Learn** |

**Social Capital**

Your ‘social capital’ is the value of who you know and what those relationships are able to accomplish. In this context, we are talking about how your social capital can help you get a job and advance within your career. As the common saying goes, “It isn’t just *what* you know that matters, it’s *who* you know.” Meaning, people that have more and stronger relationships with others in industry are more likely to earn more and be employed – relationships matter!

**Common Ways of Documenting Competence and Character**

Not only are relationships important for getting opportunities, they can also be important as “social proof” that you are skilled and trustworthy. Getting documentation of others speaking well of you can help you get a job. Below are a few common ways of documenting people’s positive opinions about you.

* **Letter of Recommendation**: a document written by someone you know recommending you for a specific opportunity (a job, a college program, etc.) and which describes your qualities, abilities, and accomplishments.
* **Reference Letter**: a document written by someone you know that speaks broadly about your qualities, abilities, and accomplishments and is not written for a specific opportunity (a job, a college program, etc.).
* **Online Endorsement**: professional media platforms, like LinkedIn, allow others to publicly endorse that you have specific skills.

**How to Get a Reference, Recommendation or Endorsement**

Below is advice on how to get a letter of recommendation, reference letter or online endorsement.

1. **Pick a writer**. Choose someone that knows you well (so they will have a lot to say), you have a good relationship with (so they are more likely to agree to write the document), and have relevant expertise (so those that read the document are more likely to believe the content).
2. **Ask the writer**. Ideally, ask them far in advance of when you need the document. Ask them in person and follow up with an email.
3. **Help the writer**. Explain why you want the document. Give them a list of qualities, abilities and accomplishments you think they might include. Consider sending them a website or two about how to write the recommendation, reference or endorsement.

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| **Do** |

Follow the below steps to get documentation from others of your qualities and abilities.

1. **Decide what you need.** If you are planning on applying to a university, research whether their application requires one or more letters of recommendation and, if so, what content is required. Decide if you need a reference letter or an online endorsement for job applications.
2. **Make a list of people that could write the type of document(s) you need**. Identify people you know well, have a good relationship with and have expertise relevant to the type of document you need.
3. **Make a plan to ask**. Decide what you will say, when you will say it and how you will say it.

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| **Reflect** |
| **What**: Which type of documentation will you focus on (letter of recommendation, reference letter, endorsement)?  |  |
| **Who:** List 5 people you will ask, who they are, and how you know them.  |  |
| **Need:** Describe to your writer why you are asking them for this documentation.   |  |
| **Qualities, Abilities and Accomplishments**: List which qualities, abilities and accomplishments you will ask the writer to focus on.   |  |