Transcript: Finding Fit: Letters of Recommendation

Welcome everyone my name is Nelli Balkarova and thank you for joining us for

today's webinar Finding Fit: Understanding the Power of Letters of

Recommendation. Just a few things before I introduce the speaker. If you're having

technical difficulties during the webinar we suggest for you to leave the

webinar and then join back in through the link that was sent to you via email.

We also recommend shutting down other programs such as email as they tend to

slow down the audio in the video. If you have any questions during the

presentation please type them into the question box in your control panel and I

will bring them up at the end of a webinar. We will share the link to the

webinar recording within the next week via email. Lastly, at the end of a webinar

you will see a quick 1-minute survey pop up on your screen. Please take a moment

to fill out the survey we would really appreciate your feedback. Now I will turn

it over to Dr. Greg Niemeyer the director of APA's Office of Continuing Education,

[Greg Niemeyer] Good morning and welcome to Understanding the Power of Letters of

Recommendation and believe me they are in fact powerful! I'm Dr. Greg Niemeyer.

I direct the office of CE in psychology at the American Psychological

Association as well as the Center for Learning and Career Development and the

Center for Interprofessional Training and Education. Prior to coming to APA I

served as a director of training of an APA approved doctoral program for about

a decade and another decade as a graduate coordinator overseeing seven

different doctoral programs both on the research side like neuroscience and

developmental at social and on the professional side like counseling in

clinical. My goal today is to bring some of that experience that I've had

going around the carousel of admissions about 30 times, directly to you so you

can pull back the curtain and be able to understand what it is that

admissions committees are looking for when they are reading your letters of

recommendation. Today we're going to talk all about letters of recommendation and

as we talk I want to say two things in advance. Number one, any questions you

have, any questions you have coming in to today or any questions that emerge as a

consequence of what we talked about, write those questions down send them in.

I'm very interested in questions that you have and I want to allow plenty of time

for those questions. Uou don't need to wait until the end, you can send them in at

any time -- just email them in and they'll be in the

queue for us to be able to talk about at the end. I will take an extra few minutes

at the end just to make sure we answer as many questions as possible -- so we may

well go several minutes over or five

minutes over something like that feel free to click out if you want to at any

point. not a problem but I want to take as many questions as possible. So please

formulate them, please submit them. We will get them addressed. Let's turn to

talk about the powers of letter of recommendation. One

thing I want to emphasize is that this presentation is part of a broader series

and I know some of you have already taken part in a couple of the

presentations that have happened previously. They are available if you

haven't taken part of them including ones that sort of sort through the

alphabet soup of different types of graduate degrees and programs. Another

one on getting in and getting through graduate training because of course your

goal is not only to be admitted but also to be graduated -- that's the end goal

that's where we want your eyes to be focused. The eyes are on the prize, the

prize is not admission, the prize is in fact graduation. We also did one program on

personal statements over the last couple of days and today we're going to be talking

of course about letters of recommendation and then we're arranging

a date as we speak for addressing interviewing for graduate school in

psychology and there I'm going to concentrate on a 10-point performance

check so that you know exactly how best to respond and what to expect and you

can evaluate yourself in relation to your interviewing skills and outcome

prior to going which is absolutely critical. You have a chance to rehearse

you know exactly how to behave and what they're going to you're likely to

confront and how best to respond. Today's presentation is

part of that overall series it's one segment within that series of Finding

Fit. Let's turn to talk about letters of recommendation. Well, probably the most

important thing to say at the outset is letters recommendation are like every

other component of your graduate application -- one element in every single

element of your graduate application. And by elements I mean your GPA your GRE

your letters of recommendation, your personal statement. Every single

component has a distinctive purpose. It has a distinctive objective. It has a

reason for being included because if it did not have a distinctive reason it

would not be required. Yes, all those elements actually work together to form

a gestalt -- the whole should be greater then the sum of the parts. Yes, there is

some overlap among them as if you were to see them laid out in a Venn diagram

overlapping with one another. But, if any one element was

exclusively or primarily redundant with the other elements it would actually not

be included in a graduate application. The more you understand the purpose of

the element, the better you can actually address that purpose. You can only judge

your success in anything against the objectives related to that thing. So,

if you understand the objectives of the latter recommendation you can gauge how

successful you're likely to be in relation to them. What is the purpose?

What is the objective of letters recommendation? Well, it's to secure

outside evaluations of you as a candidate, as an applicant from sources

that most closely approximate the actual and factual people you're going to be

working with -- the faculty with whom you'll be working. In

general, you'll want to be getting letters recommendation that reflect personal

professional and interpersonal commentaries on you from people who've

worked with you and can comment on those various and sundry domains. Research in

the area of graduate admissions clearly indicates that letters of recommendation

are among the most significant sources of information for graduate admissions

committee in part because they're looking for the evaluation of you as a

candidate from somebody who's just exactly like they are at

another university. And they know that that person is best situated to be able

to determine whether Sally whether Jamal whether Steven is a good candidate for

graduate application because they know what it takes to be a good graduate

student. It's a very powerful arguably prepotent factor it's very important to

choose your letter writers carefully. Let's turn to talk about choosing your

letter writers. Knowing how important they are it means that you want to be

very deliberative, you want to be very thoughtful, you want to be very mindful

in who you choose. How many people are you going

to choose? Well, most places are asking for three-letter writers and I think

that's a good number to concentrate on. If they asked for three give three. In a

rare instance if someone knows you in a very distinctive way that is not

addressed by the other letter writers, it is possible to add a fourth. You do not

want to add a fifth six seven eight nine ten because it aligns into a instance of

fan mail. You do not want your letter writers to wind up being perceived

as writing fan mail. If you start offering four, five, six,

seven, eight letters of recommendation, it's starting to become diagnostic from

the standpoint of the admissions committee. So, they asked for

three, you're looking for three. How do you choose them? Well, in general you're

looking for somebody who can speak to different elements of your experience.

Certainly you want somebody from your University maybe who's taught you in

class in an academic context. Maybe you've had a class that you work closely,

a small class, you work closely with the professor. Maybe you've had a professor

for a couple different courses. Maybe you had a professor for a course that's

particularly related to the graduate program in which you're applying. If

you're applying to a professional side then you may well want like a clinical

counseling school program you may well want a more clinical this may be

somebody from a context in which you volunteered or somebody who taught a

course on more the professional side of things. And then you want somebody who

can speak to your research. Maybe you were part of a research team. Maybe you

just took a research methods course but ideally you want somebody who can speak

to each of those domains. Again if you're applying to a professional program that

would include the clinical or professional as well as academic and

research. If you're not applying to a professional program you're really

looking for academic and research recommendations. Your are canvassing

the people you know well who can speak favorably on your behalf based on their

interaction with you. Ideally you want all of them to be doctoral level PhD or

PsyD. Sometimes it happens particularly in large universities I taught a

University of Florida for 30 years we have 56,000 students with over 2,000

psychology majors and that is 20% of who we teach 80% or non-majors. Sometimes

you're in classes of a 100, 200, 300 people and you don't get to know

your professor well but you've worked with a graduate student may be on their

thesis and dissertation or in their research program. So it is very

reasonable for you, if you say, gosh I don't know the professor,

but I know the graduate students. It's very reasonable for you to approach the

graduate student and say, would you be willing to write a strong letter

of recommendation for me for graduate programs and would you consider asking your

faculty to co-sign it? This is a way that you can get a letter from a PhD

co-signed by the doctorate who supervises the graduate student but

still have the advantage of having the person who writes the letter knowing you

well and being able to speak to your particular qualities, skills and the

attributes that you would bring to your graduate training program. You can

accomplish your goals of having the doctoral

person at the same time somebody who knows you well. In choosing letter

writers we do not want any politicians family, friends, practice and therapists

and so forth. Some of that can work at an undergraduate level. I certainly can

recall being on admissions committees at the undergraduate level where people had

maybe friends of the family and were senators or Congress men or women write

on their behalf and that may get your attention at an undergraduate level. It

will be an absolute belly flop at a graduate level. You really want people

who are current faculty or are PhDs and can speak to your professional

qualifications and skills and abilities. No friends, no family, no practicing

therapists. Nothing outside of that domain. Now that being said it doesn't

mean they have to be all psychologists, they don't. Maybe you were an English

major and you can have a professor who can speak to the quality of your writing

that could be a huge asset. Or a chemistry professor who you can speak to your

scientific ability, your critical thinking, your analytic ability -- huge

advantage. Please don't think it has to be exclusively psych professors

because that isn't the case. Let me encourage you to think about choosing

people who know you well you can speak to different

aspects of your experience and importantly who are likely to take the

time to write a strong letter for you. If at all possible, if you know your

professor well, or your professors well you probably know people who have had

letters written for by those professors or there may be some

just general knowledge out there in the ether about his or her quality of the

letters they write. Feel free to ask around friends who writes a good letter.

Do you know, Dr. Stevens? Do you know Dr. Brown? Do they write good letters? You

want to be sure that they're willing to write a strong letter and take the time

to sit down and write a good letter. For me, it takes about two hours to write a

letter I review. The material that's given to me takes me about an hour to

formulate what I'm going to say and it takes about another hour to write it. Two

hours is a lot of time in a faculty schedule, a lot of time. Particularly a

lot of time that doesn't have any direct payoff for the faculty member. That's the

amount of time it takes to review a manuscript, that's amount of time it

takes to review a grant. That's the amount of time it takes to prepare a

lecture. So, it's a big chunk of time so it means that when somebody agrees to

write or letter for you they are actually making a pretty substantial

commitment. Now. how do you ask for a letter of recommendation? What I encourage you

to do is this. Go to the faculty member and ask them very candidly, very directly

would you be willing to write me a strong letter of recommendation for

graduate study at psychology and then pause wait listen for the reaction. If

you hear absolutely, I'd be delighted to my pleasure.

Sure when do you need it? That's what you want to hear. If on the other hand you

hear a pregnant pause, you hear stammering, you hear reservation or

concern, it's very reasonable for you to read that diagnostically and say I

appreciate your consideration thank you very much and simply walk away and do

not return. There's no reason to try to secure a letter from somebody

who is ambivalent or somebody is too hurried or somebody who is uncomfortable

and probably they are not going to write a good letter and in truth if they agree

to write a letter very few people will write a poor letter there's too much

liability and there's not enough payoff and writing a poor letter so chances are

if they commit to writing they're going to write a good one but just be aware

and be sensitive to their response just because you ask them doesn't mean you

have to use that letter you could say I'll be I'll get back to you I

appreciate your consideration thanks very much and then move on down the road

if they'd be. All letters of recommendation incidentally should be

requested in person. You do not want to email your

professor and say would you be willing to write me a letter? It's too easy to

put that into my C file -- I categorize everything that comes in to me is an

ABCD level of urgency. That's a C that's not an A that's not a

B that's a C. It's not a D but I never get the B's I rarely get to the C's.

It's very easy to overlook that. It doesn't mean I wouldn't be willing, I

wouldn't be interested but I think I need to talk to this person little bit

more and then it's easy just forget it not be able to get back to. Letters of

recommendation should be requested in person. Schedule a meeting. Go in and talk to

the faculty member and talk with them in person or go to them after class. What

you want to do is provide every letter writer with a certain amount of

information. That information is as follows: I want you to consider

writing a thumbnail sketch. A thumbnail sketches one single sheet of paper

front side only that includes the following information: it includes your name

and contact information promptly. If I have questions about your letter

recommendation I want to be able to email you I don't want to have to be

looking at I want to be having a Google I don't have to be felt one of file for

scraps of paper. I want to just have this sheet of paper, boom there it is -- John

Stevenson and there's your email and I just emailed you very directly. The type

of program to which you're applying. You know the type of program you're applying

to -- general experimental masters, you're applying to

a PysD, you're applying to a PhD in neuroscience but that doesn't mean that

the faculty members that you're going to be requesting your

letters from know what program you're going to be applying to and they may

assume you're applying to the kind of program that they themselves graduated

from. So you say I want to apply to a PhD program and you have a

developmental professor who's writing for you and they assume it's a

developmental program but really it's a clinical program or really it's in

neuroscience program. You want to be very clear -- I'm applying to a PhD

program in social psychology very prominent under thumbnail sketch.

Indicate how they know you. I know this sounds pedantic but trust me more often

than not I do not know how I know a student. Now I know that they're a

current student in my class, I know that they're in my current research

lab but very very very frequently I will forget that

I had Sally Stephens in my undergraduate abnormal class last Spring or that she

assisted with the master's thesis of one of my master students the year

before last. Or that she was elected to Psi Chi president year before

last. I mean there are lots of things I don't know about them in lots of ways

that I might have interacted with them previously that I simply don't recall.

You indicate: I took intro from you in the fall of 2018. I took I abnormal from

you in the Spring of 2019. I was on your research lab beginning in May of 2018

on through present time. We co-presented an article a presentation at the

Southeast Psych Association on such-and-such. Give the title of the

presentation, remind them how they know you. Indicate your GRE and GPA. You want

to be very candid you want be forthright. Remember your GPA is not a single number

it's three different GPAs that's why I have GPAs in plural you're not having

GPA you have three GPAs. GPA one is your overall GPA. GPA two is your GPA in your

last two years and GPU three is your GPA in the major. Guess what? As an admissions

committee I'm far less interested in your overall GPA which almost assuredly

is your weakest GPA then I am your other two GPAs how you did in the major and

how you did most recently because those are better predictors of your graduate

school success. Lead with your first with your best foot so indicate your

strongest GPAs on your thumbnail sketch. If there's a weakness to be had in your

GPA or your GRE, your faculty will attend to that do not attend to it yourself in

your personal statement you do not ever want to lead with your weak suit. You

never want to turn your bad profile toward the camera. Like on

on Instagram and you want to put your good profile forward. Let the faculty

member call your attention to the fact that gosh I had a GRE in 70

percentile my GPA isn't quite what I would have thought here's why and let

them address that in their letters of recommendation rather than you

addressing it in your personal statement. And then you want bulleted items that

reflect what you would like to include for them to include their

letter. Put down things you've done. I volunteered for this, I volunteered for

that, I was elected a treasurer of Psi Chi, I served as my fraternity or

sorority vice president, I attended APA convention, I did a presentation,

I had an honors thesis. Whatever you want to have feathered into that be

sure to include bulleted items that you put in your thumbnail sketch what you

are doing is you are making sure that I as a letter writer that I have the

information I need to be able to cite concrete examples that represent

exemplars of the qualities or characteristics or experiences that I

want to characterize in your letter to the admissions committee. You are

helping me enormously write a much stronger letter and don't forget the

moment I agree to write your letter my goal is to write you a good letter.

You are assisting me by spoon-feeding me as much information as you can in very

concrete, very specific form. I could just take it out, I could just "boom" drop it

right in to my letter. Don't worry about the three-letter writers writing the

same thing. Believe me, they won't. No two letters are exactly the same

because they are going to be talking about the experience they've had with

you in disparate ways. They've had you in different classes and different research

teams in different kind of perspectives and venues so the fact that they may

have a shared set of 5 or 10 things that you are spoon-feeding them they're

likely to each choose two or three of those feather them in and even if there

are points of consensus that is redundancy that's a good thing

that's not a bad thing. Sometimes students will say gosh if I tell them

all the same five things it's going to look like they're just copying one

another's letter. Well if you read the letters you see that's absolutely not

true the letters will look incredibly distinct and the fact that they all

three mentioned that you're Psi Chi president is not a bad thing. If you

think about a movie that you've seen recently... Gosh did you

see Renee Zellweger in "Judy" she was incredible and if five people tell you

that, does that does that detract from their evaluation? Does it detract from

Zellweger's performance? No, it makes it clear, sort of this is a consensus

outstanding performance. It's going to work to your favor if there is

redundancy across those letters.

Redundancy is not a problem. You can see how you're

providing them with this information is hugely advantageous and advantageous in

relation to them doing what they want to do which is writing you an outstanding

letter. Give them a prominent deadline for completion make sure that deadline

is earlier than the earliest deadline. They're going to

have these emails trickling in requesting that they upload their

letters across many weeks of time. You're gonna have like five, ten different

universities it's gonna be tough to keep track of stuff unless you have a common

list -- here are the ten places of applying. And as I upload your letter to each of

these things as they trickle in across my desktop, I can just tick them tick

them off and then if you come back and check with me you can be assured that

they're done and I'll know when I'm done. I'll know one gosh you know Sally is

done. I just finished the last one, very helpful. You want to provide them a

list of all schools and preferably you want to do it at one time. You don't want

them to be blindsided. They think you're applying to three

places and they keep getting these emails from universities ten, twelve

fifteen universities later they're still getting

prompts to upload your letter and complete your evaluations online. Give them

a complete list, give to them at time. It just makes it more organized

more streamlined more effective more efficient. Sometimes you'll have an

opportunity to put other inclusions to your application I will only invite you

to consider two possibilities. One is, if you have that opportunity to upload in

your application, if you've published anything yes, your publication or

publications if you have one would situate you in the top couple percent of

people applying to graduate school. You definitely want to upload a PDF of any

publication of course it will be listed in your CV but seeing is believing.

The palpable power of seeing the front page of the publication

is enormous so you would want to put that in there. The other thing that is iffy

but it's worth considering, is if you've done an honors thesis or senior

thesis. If it's a strong thesis it's worth maybe considering putting

that in your application as well. I would encourage you to check with your faculty

on that however some senior theses are completely reasonable -- they

definitely satisfy the for undergraduate senior thesis but they

really don't approximate the girth, the depth, the breadth of a master's thesis

or dissertation so they may not be an ideal reflection in that regard. Others

really do approximate the majority of senior theses that I have supervised

wound up being published articles and they will be great inclusions in a graduate

application because the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. If

you've done a senior thesis that looks like a thesis or dissertation it tells

me you can do a thesis or dissertation. I will just conclude by saying just

a couple things. If the letter writer gives you an opportunity

to review the letter as they sometimes will please take that opportunity. I

understand that you will have had to have relinquished your right to see the

letter. It's called waiving your right when you

waive the right to see a letter recommendation what you are doing is you

are saying I am admitting I am accepting the fact that I am relinquishing my

right to request to see the letter. But you're not relinquishing the right

to see the letter somebody shows it to you. You're relinquishing the right to

request it. You're not not enabled to see it but if somebody

decides to show it to you, you have not waived the right to look at it. You're

not saying I refuse to look at a letter if it's given to me, you're saying I'm

refusing to retain the right to request to see it. If you don't waive that right

people are not going to take your letters seriously because they will feel

like if if you were suspicious about what people write they're not going to

write anything candid. So, you're going to have to waive the right but it doesn't mean

you've waived the right to actually see it. Tt means you've waived the right to

request it. If you do review the letter that's been given to you if actually

says gosh take a look at this see what you think feel free to add anything you

want track the changes delete only fact errors. If they say gosh she was elected

president of Psi Chi and it was really vice president, cross that out but vice

president. But don't delete things other than factual errors.

Track the changes give it back to the faculty member and

then they will move forward from there. And they will be genuinely appreciative

because again you are joining them and helping them to accomplish the goal that

they've set out to do -- which is to write an outstanding letter of recommendation.

It's very clear to you that I could write you a better

letter the better I know you the more I know about you better a letter I can

write so I very much appreciate to help you give me in fashioning a better

letter. Let me pause there I think that's a good place for us to stop and open it

up for questions and comments then I'll call it closed with just a comment or

two about some upcoming programs. Any questions, thoughts.

[Balkarova] Thank you Greg. it looks like we have a few questions already so I will go ahead

and jump right in. The first question is, any specific tips for how a PsyD

application letter of recommendation might differ from a PhD?

[Niemeyer] Yes, it will have

less of an emphasis on the research and more an emphasis on the interpersonal

features and the clinical features. Volunteer work will be more prominent

-- clubs, organizations extracurricular activity any any kind of

clinical things that you've done working in volunteer capacities in the community

for example. those things would all take premium. The research will be relatively

under dimensionalized. But that's really the

only difference and you still want to put research. In any PsyD

program you're still going to have to complete a dissertation maybe not a

master's thesis but a dissertation and in most of them not all of them it needs

to be an original research product. And if people do not succeed in graduating

from a doctoral program the majority of the time the reason for that is the

inability to do the dissertation. You're still going to have the research

represented, it's just not going to be as prominent a feature. And you

want to be sure you indicate I'm applying to PsyD programs and that

sends a signal to your letter writers that they want to write a letter for a

professional a professional school and they will know exactly what to do.

[Balkarova]

The next question is, what does it mean when faculty ask you to draft the letter?

Is that an indication that they're not invested in you?

[Niemeyer] That's an indication that they're lazy. It says I'm

busy and I may not know you as well as I would like. It's saying gosh that's a heck of a lot of work and probably all those things are true. Take the invitation. I wouldn't take it as a I wouldn't

necessarily take it as indication that they're not interested. It's just as

easy to say I'm unable to do that as it is to say go ahead and draft it. My

experiences it's actually harder to have you write the letter and then me rewrite

it because it's harder to undo what somebody's done

than it is to do it right yourself the first time. But it's an opportunity

and so I just for giggles alone I would go ahead and draft my own letter

of recommendation, feathering and everything you

want being not boastful but being you know very you know candidly upbeat about

your experiences and about your qualities and characteristics. Have it in

the bag. It's a good exercise to do and then if a faculty member says gosh

draft for me and and I'll take it from there. What you can do is give them

the letter and then give them your thumbnail sketch to and say here's you

know thumbnail sketch of other stuff it's kind of awkward for me to write my

own letter but here's a draft for you to work with and probably they'll

tweak it and maybe integrate some other pieces in there and so if their

own impressions and experiences. But it's really honestly it's imostly an

indication of laziness. It's an indication that I'm really busy I would

love to be able to recommend you if I could knock it out in 15 minutes instead

of two hours, great. Now I think they're much less likely to do that they're more

likely to do that if you've only been a student in their classroom because they

don't you know everything else about you and in a way what they're asking is.

could you give me that thumbnail sketch. They don't think about the thumbnail

sketch so they just like give me the letter. I think that's much less likely

to come from a faculty member that you've really apprenticed with or you've

been in the research team. The better they know you the less likely they are to do

that.

[Balkarova] The next question is, if you have already asked for letters of

recommendation is it too late to send a thumbnail sketch?

[Niemeyer] No because they may not have written a letter yet. If they haven't written the

letters I mean let me tell you many a slip twixt comp and lip I mean somebody

will come to me and say Dr. Niemeyer can you write me a letter

recommendation? I'll say absolutely and then you know like two weeks later I'm

tormenting myself like I gotta find that two hours. I gotta find that two hours.

The last thing in the world I can do is to do 15 minutes here and 20 minutes

there. I gotta find two hours and if not it's gonna take me four hours because

the interruption will create disconnects and then I got to catch up where I left

off it's too much work so I gotta find a two hours slot. It may take me a few

weeks to find a two hour slot. Just because they said yes doesn't mean

they've written the letter so absolutely get them the sketch. I

guarantee they'll get it done a lot more quickly once they get that

thumbnail sketch because they've got all the ingredients all they have to do is

bake the cake.

[Balkarova] Some universities were allowing room to view the

recommendation upon admission. Do you still recommend to waive the right to

see?

[Niemeyer] Absolutely waive it. Why would you

introduce any second guessing paradigm whatsoever? You don't need to see the

letter. Have faith that you know this person well

enough that they would recommend you. If you have concerns or qualms do

not ask that person. Again, they may invite you I would always

give my letter of recommendation to my students once I finished it. I never

asked them to write it and I would never you know okay occasionally if I didn't

if I felt like there was maybe move that they had more than I was aware of or I

thought I was struggling for specific examples, I would give it to them and say

here's your letter give me any thoughts you have in relation to it. Most commonly

I just write the letter and then I give them a copy and I go ahead and uploaded

it to the the portals for the graduate program. It's not at all uncommon to

share that letter even though you don't waive you're right.

[Balkarova] If your major wasn't psychology but a related field what professor would be best to ask?

[Niemeyer] Great question. You may be a chemistry major, you may be an

English major, you may be a sociology major --that's fine you don't have

psychologists or psych department people writing

your letters because people from chemistry are going to be able to speak

to your scientific ability. People from English will be able to speak to your

writing abilities. Not a problem even if you are a psych major you may

have one letter from a psych professor but you may have another letter from

people in other in other areas hard or soft sciences or humanities or

whatever they all have graduate programs they all know graduate students they all

know the kind of thing that's required -- autonomy, independence, critical thinking,

capacity to work well with others diligence, responsibilities -- all those

features they're critical to getting through graduate school successfully.

You can be nondenominational. You really don't

have to worry. It's ideal to have at least one psych professor,

but it's not essential and certainly if you majored in something else you

absolutely want to have somebody from that major because they probably know

you well and and that's the thing that rules supreme that reigns supreme is how

well somebody knows you. You don't want three letters that are just what I would

call platitude or nice-guy letters... Greg Niemeyer's applying he was in

by abnormal psych class made in A. Good guy, ask good questions. Seem to like they

be able to raise his hand with you know a cogent thought. Did well, was there most

times least that I looked. Those kinds of things just aren't that helpful

so the better somebody knows you the better their letter will be so you

better let go with people who know you well regardless of what walk of life

they're coming from.

[Balkarova] Can one letter be written by two faculty jointly -- the

faculty that work in the same lab together? How is that perceived?

[Niemeyer] I think that's fine. Sometimes in this in

this world we have a team science approach and you'd have multiple people

co-leading a lab and they could cosign a letter. They may have different

experiences and they may want to write each from their own perspective too.

If they want to cosign the same letter that's fine. If they want to write two

separate letters that's fine too. They're standing for you on the basis of their experience

of you, so either it's fine. You're gonna need three letters, you can't count

one letter signed by two people as two different letters -- that's still a

single letter.

[Balkarova] If three recommendations are required is it helpful to send a fourth recommendation if a fourth recommender is well known in the field and could write a fairly good letter for you?

[Niemeyer] Yes, that would be an example of where that fourth person for

whatever reason isn't a good third person then yes. I mean you've got three

people they speak to different domains they've got distinctive experience

they're gonna be very strong letters you're reluctant to relinquish any of

them and then you have this fourth ace in the hole who knows you who is a

recognized figure in the field and you want that endorsement. I

would upload it as a fourth. Part of what's going to happen is the

if you only have

two they're going to penned your application they're not going to not

review you but they're going to say gosh that was an incomplete one why didn't

you get the third letter? If you have a fourth one a lot of times people

will say, is well they asked three people wasn't sure whether one of them had

finished their letter or maybe they were finishing it late you know got anxious

and asked for a fourth to get a four word letter. There's really no

negative attribution of a fourth letter but once you get beyond that it gets to

be fan mail. Only do four if you had a good reason but that's a good

reason.

[Balkarova] We'll take a few more questions. The next one is, I'm currently an

undergrad student attending an online school. I have my eye on an MA program

they offer. I have been emailing the professors prior to the classes

beginning trying to establish a relationship and get my name out there.

Some have responded well and one even offered me to potentially assist on a

research project. is this appropriate or is there a more appropriate way to gain

an academic network while doing online school?

[Niemeyer] You should write a book. That's exactly what you want to do. I mean that's exactly what you want to do. I call it the multiple approach where you

identify faculty, you read some articles they've written, you email

them you said gosh I read so-and-so that you wrote. You ask them whether they

have anything more recent in that area that hasn't yet been published? Of course

they do because it takes two years to get something published from inception

to publication. You know the answer to that before you even ask the question

which is the perfect kind of question to ask.

when you know answer. They write back they say oh yes by the way, here it's not

published yet we just submitted it. You say thank you very much that's another

touch. You read the article. You get back to them and you say gosh that's really

interesting, I wonder if you're doing if you've done blah blah blah blah

that you talked about in the discussion yet or you're doing any further work?

They say oh yes by the way we are doing that or no we'd love to do that.

You write back, it's like gosh would you be taking any students turns out I'm

applying for a program in such-and-such an area? Then you're being reviewed as a

person and not as a number. That's a huge difference it's just like getting a

letter recommendation for somebody you know versus somebody you don't know you.

You've suddenly become a person and that distinguishes you immensely from the

crowd. You should write the book that's exactly how you go about forging

a relationship a virtual relationship in a way that's going to serve your interest as well.

[Balkarova] Career transition applying to counseling masters with MBA obtained

more than 10 years ago. What kind of letters of recommendation would you

think/suggest to seek?

[Niemeyer] You're applying for what?

[Balkarova] Counseling master's with an MBA obtained more than 10 years ago. [Niemeyer] Okay so not a problem. I think the MBA 10 years ago is a little distant both temporally

and topically, so I wouldn't be necessarily trying to chase down unless

you had some maintain some contact or had a particularly good relationship

with one of your MBA faculty. They might be one of your recommenders mostly

I would go for if you've done any volunteer work or you've had any

additional courses that would be related to counseling any experiences related to

counseling. Any you know social service kind of volunteer experience.

Those are probably where you're going to be drawing from. You're current employer

would be a very reasonable letter for master's program in counseling. Be great

if it was topically related in some way to counseling or social service

but they could still speak to you as an employee, responsible, dedicated you know

diligent thoughtful and so forth. You might think about one

letter from yesteryear back at the MBA program as an optional and that I would

think about something related social service or counseling and maybe current

employer and that's fine for a master's degree program that's fine.

The criteria is a little bit different they're not nearly as oriented toward research.

They don't necessarily need to be as uniformly current professors

for a master's program in counseling.

[Balkarova] Last question. Would a recommendation

from someone in the field that has only known you for six months be okay or

would admissions frown upon the short relationship?

[Niemeyer] You can learn a lot

about a person in six months. I mean think about any relationship you've had --

a dating relationship, six months into it you you've learned some things. I

wouldn't say six months necessarily disqualifies you in any way shape or

form particularly if it's somebody that you've worked with on a regular basis.

If it's somebody you've only seen once a month for six months that's one thing but if

you've seen them multiple times per week then chances are they've seen

your work they know you as a person they've seen you interact with other

people. Just ask yourself what based on the basis of what interactions

you've had with that person how well would they do they know me and what

would they be able to say about me and that will answer whether or not they'd

be a good letter writer. Do they know me well enough to say things about me that

would be relevant to my performance in a graduate program? And if the answer to

that is yes then and the answer is yes. Six months to me is certainly

adequate if you've had sustained interaction. Let me just conclude by

just reminding you that we will have one more interviewing for graduate study

in psychology and this will be an important one if you can tune in for it that would be

fabulous. We're establishing a date for it now and because everything we've

talked about up to this point is really designed to qualify you for selection to

interview once you get an interview this slate is wiped clean.

Everyone is acceptable no one gets interviewed who they don't regard as an

acceptable candidate for graduate school. The question then is how do you seal

the deal? How do you move from getting an interview to getting an admission. That's

what we're gonna be talking about with our 10-point performance check in the

Finding Fit series interviewing for graduate school. I hope today's comments

have been helpful for you. Hope it's been useful for you to learn a little bit

about the power of the letter recommendation and I wish you success in

your pursuit of the graduate study of your choice. Bye for now.