

OLSAS References:

References are another important part of your application.

You will need at least 2 references for the OLSAS application. In the OLSAS chart, found on the website, all schools specify who should write the reference letters (academic &/or non-academic); most schools prefer 2 academic letters; however there are some exceptions. Toronto doesn't require reference letters, Queen's will read an optional 3rd reference if it is a non-academic reference (in addition to the 2 academic references you have submitted), and Windsor requires one academic and one non-academic reference. Our advice is to place two academic reference contacts in the first two reference placeholders, and to submit an additional non-academic reference for the 3rd, optional, placeholder.

Each referee will need to submit an online form and upload a letter outlining your skills, abilities, and characteristics suitable for the study and practice of law. If your referee is unable to provide the reference through e-mail, it is possible to download a PDF form through OLSAS that you can provide to your referee. They will mail this form and their reference letter directly to OLSAS.

Tell your referee that they will receive a link to a form through e-mail from OLSAS. It is very important that they save this e-mail, as it will only be sent once! Ask your referee not to delete the e-mail until they have submitted the form, including an uploaded letter, as OLSAS is unable to resend the e-mail. OLSAS also will not send reminder e-mails. It is the responsibility of the applicant to follow-up with the referees concerning the completion of the references. The referee may find it helpful if you provide them with your essay answers, admission requirements, and sketch. Provide them with any information that will help with their task.

If you are not applying this year, start cultivating relationships with faculty members as we find many students have difficulty getting references, so go to your classes, meet with your professors during office hours, and consider conducting research with them; however, remember that you need someone that can speak to your academic background.

The references must be received by OLSAS (directly from your referee) no later than the application deadline. This means that with no exceptions, your referee must submit the form with the uploaded letter (or in the case of using the PDF form - mail the reference letter and form to OLSAS) in time for it to be received before November 1st. This must be considered in the planning process, particularly if November 1st falls on a weekend.

Evaluate who can best provide a good supporting reference for your application: having a lawyer or politician write a letter is not helpful unless they can provide substantial information and specific examples of your skills. Avoid character references, as it is better that someone has seen your skills (like leadership, communication etc.). Consider first what you want discussed in your reference and then seek out people who can provide that information.

One admissions officer mentioned to us that it would work to an applicant's advantage if a professor, for a course where the applicant received a low mark, wrote a reference letter as it can explain what happened that term or in a specific course. Of course, the reference letter would need to be very positive in all other ways.

Ask your potential referee in person, “Are you able to write a supporting reference?” If they aren’t, it is better to find out now, as reference letters can make a difference in your application package.

Give your referee enough time and information to write the letter; try to meet in person at least 6 weeks prior to the deadline to provide them with your personal statement, the admission requirements, and your resume.

Professors expect students to ask them for reference letters – this is part of their job – it’s not a favour, but they can only write strong reference letters for you if they know you well enough!

If OLSAS receives more than three reference forms or additional letters of reference, the additional documents will not be forwarded to the law schools. Only the references indicated on the OLSAS application will be accepted (there are two reference forms and one optional reference form available through the OLSAS application).

Click on Referee 1 to enter the contact information for your first reference. The system will allow you to download a PDF form for your referee **only if your referee does not have an email address. If your referee has an email address then use it, and they will be sent an email as well as the reference form and instructions.**

You need to have all of your referee information available before adding it, as you can’t go in and out of an individual referee section – the system will not let you save partial information. Once you save this information, it can be edited; however, you cannot make changes once you have downloaded the PDF form **or sent the email**. Ensure that you have all of the correct information, and confirmation from your referee that they are willing to be your referee before entering the information.

Like the verifiers, you need to fill out everything, including the phone number, ensuring that you use the most professional/business address for your referee.

Note that there is a comments box that you can complete. This information will be sent in the body of an email that OLSAS sends directly to your referee. In this comments box, you could mention things like: when you first met with your referee to ask them to be a referee for your law school applications, and provide contact information on how to reach you if they have any questions. OLSAS will provide the due date of November 1st as part of the email they send.

Your referee will receive an email from OLSAS with a link to the above page. Your referee will complete this page and upload their reference letter.

In their letter, referees should be able to speak to your abilities as a future law student: can you write, conduct research, work in groups, and organize your time? If the referee has taught you, they can compare your performance relative to the rest of the class. Also included in this letter should be how long the referee has known you, and in what capacity. It is best if the referee can provide specific proof and examples of attributes they have seen you demonstrate, and not just list the skills.