

In 1999

Ultima Online was the first non-gambling video game in North America to see players profit off their game accounts by selling them for real-world dollars, typically on eBay.

63 percent

of online shoppers said it is important to have reviews of products.

BENEFIT

Special Interest Groups

ACM supports a number of special interest groups, or SIGs, that you as a member can join. SIGs provide an opportunity for people who are interested in a particular area of computer science to come together and discuss it. The SIGs are where people tend to hone their involvement with ACM.

There are currently 34 SIGs, ranging from SIGACT (algorithms and computation theory) to SIGCHI (computer-human interaction) to SIGGRAPH (computer graphics). Each group mentioned here has its own web site for more details.

The benefits offered by each SIG are different depending on its members, but as a collective they are intended to keep people up-to-date with technical developments in the specific field or subfield; provide an opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues; and deliver cutting-edge information, focused resources, and forums for discussion.

As a member of SIGCHI, I can attest to the benefits of membership. CHI's magazine, *interactions*, helps me stay abreast of developments in the field, which is essential for students working on projects that may keep them focused on one area.

For more information on specific SIGs, take a look at <http://www.acm.org/sigs/>.

—Daniel Gooch

ADVICE

Letters of Recommendation

Asking for a letter of recommendation is an *art*. What many students don't realize is just how much of the work falls on their shoulders. Here are some tips for getting that letter you need.

0. Choose wisely. The ideal letter-writer is a professor in your field of study who knows you and your work well, in who's classes you excelled, and with whom you had meaningful interactions outside of class.

1. Ask politely. If possible, make an appointment and ask the professor in person. Do not ask via a quickly jotted, informal email.

2. Ask early. It takes time to write a good letter, and professors are busy. Ask for the letter at least a month before the due date. Never ask for a letter with fewer than two weeks to go.

3. Bullet the letter yourself. The more information you provide, the better letter you will get. Write a summary of how you and the recommender know one another: courses you took, class projects you've completed, number of years you've known one another. Other information to include are your CV, which should include awards and

honor society memberships; copies of admissions essays; relevant work experience, internships, or volunteer activities; things that make you unique.

4. Make the professor's job easy. Provide a list of all the schools or organizations to which you are applying. For each, include the names of the program or department and the position you hope to hold (graduate student, intern, research assistant), and the application deadline. Write the professor's contact information on all paper forms and include pre-addressed, stamped envelopes, as needed.

5. Beware of spam filters. Occasionally the email notifications from online application services get banished to the "junk" mailbox by a spam filter. Make sure your professor receives them.

6. Waive your rights. If given the choice whether to waive or retain your rights to see the letter, waive! The readers of the letter will give the letter more weight. Plus, many letter-writers won't write a non-confidential letter. If you're nervous that the letter-writer won't write you a strong letter, ask someone else.

7. Follow up. The absent-minded professor is more than just a cliché. Your professor may forget to write the letter. Don't be afraid to send a gentle reminder as the deadline nears.

8. Thank your professor! Write a thank-you note. Email is fine.

9. Share the results. Did you get in? Let your professor know if you get the job, the internship, or the spot in graduate school. They want to know!

—David Richeson

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