

**COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC PERSONNEL (CAP)  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)**

Revised November 1, 2008

**33. Why do we need so many letters in our personnel actions?**

We require outside referees for major actions (appointment, promotion to associate and full professor and advancement to Professor VI and Above Scale). They are optional for accelerations but can be used, especially in accelerations of three or more years if the department thinks they will bolster the case. Depending on the action, receipt of three to nine analytical letters may be sufficient. Three are usually sufficient for appointment of an Assistant Professor in lower steps (I – IV), four for a large acceleration, and five to nine for promotions or appointments at Assistant V or higher (with at least five letters in promotion files that are free of the appearance of conflict of interest as defined in FAQ 34).

If departments are careful to specify the kinds of information needed when they solicit extramural appraisals, the letters may be of better quality and more helpful. However, leading language must be avoided in solicitation letters. External letters providing detailed analysis of the candidate's accomplishments and thoughtful evaluation of the professor's contribution by recognizable standards are most helpful. Brief, testimonial letters and letters from close associates of the candidate are, even in large quantity, of less use.