

Letters of Recommendation

For everyone except for the San Francisco Match, Child Neurology and Ophthalmology, all Letters of Recommendation are sent through ERAS. You are allowed four letters of recommendation per program. These don't have to be the same for each program. For example, you may choose to use a different four letters for your transitional programs than for your Radiology programs or you may use the same letters for both. Check the web site specific to each program you're applying to for details on LORs. Programs like LORs to be confidential. Therefore, request four letters to be sent to our office and check confidential in the area indicated on your ERAS form. These will then be attached by our office and then joined with your MSPE letter and transcripts in an official electronic file. Programs can then download your folder, with the exception of your MSPE letter, which is held at the ERAS post office until November 1st. **Anyone applying in Internal Medicine, or Surgery – All programs require a Chairman's letter. Anyone applying in OB/GYN- usually requires a Chairman's letter or an Internal Medicine Attending letter. Applicants to EM require a "CORD" letter from an EM program director, not necessarily from your own school. You may obtain multiple CORD letters. Please check on the LOR requirements on each programs website. You may find surprising information. For example, Children's Hospital in Boston requires a LOR from a faculty member in Internal Medicine for all applicants.**

Frequently Asked Questions about Letters of Recommendation (LORs)

Do I need to get LORs for residency as I do my rotations?

It is perfectly acceptable to get LORs during a rotation. The most senior faculty in the field of your choice (who knows you well) is the most appropriate LOR writer.

Whom should I ask for a LOR?

People well known in the field and "well connected" senior faculty are best to ask. However, a junior faculty member who knows you well and really likes you is also a good bet. Ask the faculty member if he or she feels that they can write a very strong letter on your behalf. You don't want any noncommittal letters!

Can I ask for an LOR over the telephone?

Yes, but make an appointment to see the attending. Bring a copy of your CV, transcript (if you wish), and personal statement. The more information they have, the better letter they can write for you.

Can I see my LORs?

All ERAS LORs are scanned into the computer in the Student Affairs office and are confidential, if you waive your right to see the letter.

Who should mail my LORs?

FOR PAPER APPLICATIONS: Students get Letters of Recommendation from individual faculty members in a sealed envelope. They then include these LORs with their application packet and mail them to the SF Match. Occasionally random programs may ask for paper applications. Look at the ERAS list of program for these exceptions. Make sure that our office has a copy of these LORs on file for use for preliminary program applications through ERAS.

How many LORs should I ask for?

FOR PAPER APPLICATIONS: *Generally, a chairman's letter, plus two other letters are requested. An extra letter from a laboratory research experience is also acceptable. Have at least one or two letters from academic faculty in the field you are applying to. For early match applications, follow the instructions in your central application service packet. For ERAS you may send four LORs.*

Advice from Peers

A common point of anxiety and stress for most applicants is acquiring strong letters of recommendation to endorse the residency application. Here are some things you may want to know:

When should I start requesting letters of recommendation? You can request a letter of recommendation at any time during your 3rd or 4th year, even though many people do not begin requesting letters until they have begun their 4th year¹. Most students wait until the 4th year because that is when students do most of the rotations that directly relate to the field they are pursuing. With few exceptions, residency program directors of a particular specialty prefer to receive testimonials from attendings in their own field. In other words, if you plan to pursue a residency in general surgery (for example), a program director would prefer to have a letter from an attending surgeon written in the applicant's fourth year than from an attending psychiatrist written during the student's third year rotations. Therefore, if you have waited to get most of your recommendations in your fourth year, you should be sure to schedule your sub-I or electives in your chosen specialty early so you get recommendations on time.

You can still use letters of recommendation from your 4th and 5th rotations, but generally speaking, you should not rely on these letters to complete your application. (Refer to "Preparing Your Application" and the next question on the deadline for LOR for a discussion of why doing this would place you at a disadvantage.)

What is the deadline by which I should have all of my letters of recommendation submitted? You should attempt to have all of your letters of recommendation submitted as early as possible, but definitely by November 1st.² What happens is that all of the Dean's letters – yours, as well as those of your classmates and of students at schools all across the country – are

¹ So, if you haven't yet requested a letter of recommendation, don't panic. You're not alone. ☺

² Keep in mind that you do not need to have any letters of recommendation submitted in order to certify your application and apply to residency programs on September 1st.

electronically released on the same day, which is November 1st. Some programs (e.g. all of the upper tier programs) will not look at your application until they have received your Dean's letter³. To that end, you should endeavor to have your required letters of recommendation submitted by the same time that your residency programs will receive your Dean's letter. This is the logic behind the "November 1st" deadline.

Keep in mind, however, that many programs will start to review and invite you for interviews soon after you submit your application or on a rolling basis so having your recommendations in early will allow programs to review them also and this may improve your chances of interviewing at one of these programs. However, do not hold off submitting your application because you are waiting for all your LOR. Just get them in as soon as possible, and definitely by November 1st.

Where should the letters be sent? You should direct your letter writers to send all letters of recommendation by mail to the "Office of Student Affairs". You should provide the person writing your letter with an "ERAS Letter of Recommendation Request Form" which has a section you should fill out with the address to send the letter to. As the Office of Student Affairs receives your letters, the staff will place them in your personal file, and will upload the letters into your ERAS account.

How should I "request" letters of recommendation? Even though it can be really difficult for you to gather the courage to approach an attending for a letter of recommendation, there is still no guarantee that the attending will actually endorse you with a letter or, if the attending writes you a letter, that it'll necessarily be a good one so be sure to ask as many attending as possible. A good way to go about doing this is simply to approach the attending and say, "Would you feel comfortable writing a strong letter of recommendation on my behalf?" When you request a letter of recommendation from an attending you know well, ask for a "strong" letter of recommendation, and be sure to use the word "strong" in your request. This may help convey to the attending that you hope that the testimonial will reflect your performance as strongly as possible. If you are worried that a particular attending will not provide you with a strong letter, consult with the Office of Student Affairs for guidance.

What should I give to a potential letter writer? When you request a letter of recommendation, you should provide your letter writer with several items. The first is an "ERAS Letter of Recommendation Request Form." You can download this form from the ERAS website⁴, or you can print it out from your ERAS account once you have logged into it for the first time after mid-July. Second, you should include a current copy of your curriculum vitae and, if available, a copy of your personal statement. Third, you should include a stamped envelope directed to the mailing address of the "Office of Student Affairs." Also, although the ERAS request form provides specific instructions on how a letter of recommendation should be addressed, please remind your letter writer that the letter should be addressed as either "Dear Program Director" or "To Whom It May Concern." Be sure to stress that the letter should not be addressed to "The Office of Student Affairs"⁵. See Part III – Appendix for letter requesting letter of recommendation.

³ Moreover, some programs will review your application on a rolling basis – and grant you an invitation to interview – even though they haven't received your Dean's letter or most of your letters of recommendation.

⁴ The link to the form is: <http://www.aamc.org/students/eras/support/lorcoverus.pdf>

⁵ You'd be surprised to know that, on occasion, a letter of recommendation is addressed to "Dear Ms. Meister", or "Dear Stephanie."

Even after you complete all of these steps, and do everything correctly, it is up to the attending to actually write the letter and submit the letter to the Office of Student Affairs. You will be able to use a feature of your ERAS account – called ADTS, the automated document tracking system – to find out whether or not a particular letter of recommendation has been submitted.

How should I follow up on a letter I am waiting on? In order to follow up on a letter of recommendation, first allow several weeks to pass by – after your initial request – before you go about “reminding” your letter writer. Also, when you do attempt to “remind” your letter writer, attempt to be very diplomatic. Remember that he or she is writing your letter voluntarily, and could be very busy with other tasks. In addition, consult the Office of Student Affairs, as the Deans may be able to “encourage” an attending to complete a letter for you. You may also want to request an extra letter or two from other attendings, so that if one letter writer falls through, you have a backup letter ready to go. Also, keep in mind that although ERAS will allow you to submit 4 letters to every program, most programs only require 3 letters of recommendation.

Once a letter writer has submitted a letter of recommendation to the Student Affairs Office, be sure to send that person a ‘thank you’ note. *See Part III- Appendix for sample.*

How should I prepare for my Dean’s letter meeting? All throughout the summer, beginning in April, students will meet individually with either Dr. Susan Rosenthal or Dr. Garcia Laumbach, Dr. Dickson or Dr. Seiden for their Dean’s letters. Be sure to schedule your MSPE appointment with the Student Affairs Office when you come to the Registrar’s Office to schedule your 4th Year. You should attend the MSPE meeting with the dean with an updated CV and a personal statement (if you have one ready by that time). Be sure to review your CV well; know everything that it contains, and be able to speak confidently about your previous accomplishments. To expedite matters, and for extra practice, treat this meeting like a real residency interview. Remember that you will likely have only one opportunity to meet with the Dean for your Dean’s letter. Use this meeting as an opportunity to provide the Dean with as much relevant information about yourself as you can provide, which they will use to write a strong letter for you⁶.

What should I do if the field I’m applying to requires a Chairperson’s letter? First, find out early on whether your residency application requires a Chairperson’s letter. (For example: Anybody applying to medicine (categorical, preliminary year, or transitional year) will require a letter from Dr. Walker and those applying for surgery or a surgical specialty will require a letter from the Surgery chair.) If your residency requires a chair letter, contact the department chairman to schedule a meeting for the letter. Be sure to present the Chairperson’s office with a copy of your CV and personal statement in advance of your meeting, preferably at the time that you schedule your appointment. Also, it may take several weeks (or months) before you can actually meet with the Chair in person. Be prepared for this.

Can I use different letters of recommendation for different programs? Absolutely⁷. Let’s say, for example, that you will be applying for a residency in radiology. A typical radiology residency

⁶ Later in the year, by early fall, you will have only one opportunity to review the letter for factual accuracy and to correct any spelling errors.

⁷ This situation will typically apply to students who: 1) apply to more than one specialty (e.g. general surgery and orthopedic surgery); 2) who have a letter from an away rotation or a graduate of a program that they wish to use exclusively for that program, and; 3) who will be applying for both a preliminary position and an advanced specialty residency (which begins with the PGY-2 year) simultaneously.

requires an applicant to apply for both a 'preliminary' one-year internship program and a 4-year radiology residency program (for the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th postgraduate years) simultaneously. You may have received 3 letters from radiologists, as well as one letter from a pediatrician and another from an internist. Instead of using all three letters written by radiologists for both your preliminary internship applications and your radiology residency applications, you can use ERAS to send letters from the internist, pediatrician, and one of the radiologists to all of the preliminary internship programs. Also, you can use ERAS to send the three letters – written by the radiologists – to all of the radiology residency programs. Keep in mind that there is no limit to the number of recommendation letters that you can put onto ERAS to have available to choose from to send to individual programs.