

Guidelines for Writing Letters of Recommendation

A Guide for Faculty
Last Updated: April 27, 2009

Overview

Letters of Recommendation (LOR's) are an important part of a student's application. Residency programs use them to learn about a student's fund of knowledge, clinical judgment, interpersonal skills and personal qualities. Equally important is what type of student s/he is and his/her potential as a resident. Along with clerkship grades and the interview, ***LOR's are one of the most important factors programs use when selecting candidates.***

This page is intended for faculty writing LOR's for residency application, but may be useful for letter writers of LOR's for other purposes.

Prerequisites

- You know the student
 - As a clinical faculty member (i.e. attending, clerkship director)
 - As a research advisor for research
 - LOR's from preclinical faculty (except for research advisors) or residents are not used for residency applications.
- You know the student well enough to write a supportive recommendation.
- Letters should be written on letterhead and signed
 - Electronic letters must be in PDF format with an electronic signature.

What information do you need from your student before writing a letter?

- A "Request for Letter of Recommendation Coversheet" (For ERAS only)
 - Check to see if they do or do not waive their right to see the letter
 - AAMC ID# is good to have, but if it is not on the coversheet, it is ok. You can still write the letter and send it in.
- Have a discussion with the student
 - Learn about their interests and future goals
 - Is there anything specific they would like you to focus on?
 - Should your letter be specialty specific (this candidate will be an excellent Ob/Gyn) or general (this candidate will be an excellent and hard working resident)?
- You may want to ask for a students:
 - CV
 - Personal statement
 - Copies of evaluations
 - Transcripts
 - A photograph (to jog your memory if you haven't worked with the student in a while!)

- Non-ERAS Programs: the letter requirements for these programs are different and may require you to mail the letters directly to the student or program. The student must provide you with this information.

Timing

- Tell the student when you will submit the LOR.
- You and the student should set the deadline together.
- Email the students once you have submitted the LOR.
- It is best to write a letter immediately after the student has completed your rotation.
 - Encourage students, especially 4th year Sub-I's, to let you know early on if they would like a letter from you.
 - You can offer to write a letter for an outstanding student, especially for 3rd years who may not be planning their applications yet.

Content of a Letter

- It is important to include information appropriate to each unique student. We recommend meeting with a student before writing the LOR. Letters should include:
 - Your relationship with the student
 - How long and in what context you know the student
 - Details about student and student performance
- Potential topics
 - Student's potential
 - Professionalism
 - Interpersonal and leadership skills
 - Patient Interactions
 - Medical Knowledge
 - Passion for medicine or specialty
 - Personal Characteristics
 - Specialty specific information

Sample Outline of a Typical Letter of Recommendation:

Address to: Dear Program Director

Opening

Include student name and AAMC ID#
 Purpose of letter
 Nature and length of your relationship
 Your experience in teaching (how often, how many students)
 Include in your letter whether or not the student has waived his/her right to see this recommendation.

Body

Share specific details about the student's academic performance
 Fund of knowledge
 Clinical skills
 Personal qualities: reliability, hard working, communications skills, empathy with patients and ability to work as part of medical team

Use specific examples
Compare the student with others that you have known

Closing

Reiterate the strength of your overall recommendation
Would you recruit this person if you were a residency director?

Your signature (may be electronic)

When to say No

- You do not know the student well enough
- You can not write a strong or supportive letter
- The student's timeline is unreasonable for you and your schedule.
- You are too busy with other commitments
- Do not say yes if you cannot meet deadline. Missing LOR's or not having LOR's submitted on time can cost students their interviews.

Where to Send LOR's

- LOR's can be mailed, sent electronically via email or fax. All must be on letterhead and signed (electronic signatures are acceptable)
 - **Mail:** Marie Hartman
Career Development Center
Drexel University College of Medicine
2900 Queen Lane
Philadelphia PA 19129
 - **Fax:** 215-991-8132. Attn: Marie Hartman
 - **Email** (in a .pdf format): mhartman@drexelmed.edu

Tips

- Mail signed original if letter was faxed or emailed.
- Keep an electronic copy so that you can easily update it in the future for other opportunities
- Proofread letter – especially the student's name and gender!
- Do not reiterate the student's CV
- If you feel you can not write a strong LOR for the student, please tell him/her so that they can find someone who can.

References:

AAMC Careers in Medicine Website
Anita D. Taylor, M.A. Ed., Associate Professor & Director of Career Advising,
Oregon Health & Science SOM