Student Letters of Recommendation

For the NRMP (main) residency match:  **Letters are due September 15!**

Most students need 2-3 letters from their intended specialty. Students are instructed to ask if you can write a strong letter when they request it. **Letters of recommendation are crucial for our students.** Program Directors (PD) rate letters of recommendation as second in importance for residency selection processes across specialties¹. **So please be honest and decline if you cannot write a strong supportive LOR.**

Writing a good letter in 1-2 pages:

Make it clear that you know the student and can write an informed letter.

As you write, consider the specific ACGME competencies (ie Medical Knowledge, Patient Care, Professionalism, Communication, Practice-based learning and Systems-based practice). These are the skills that PDs are looking for in incoming interns.

Use specific examples of behaviors you have observed to inform your recommendation. A story regarding the time that your student specifically went back into a room and comforted a patient who had just received bad news is much more powerful than simply stating that the student worked well with patients.

**Be honest but remember this is a recommendation not an evaluation.**

Consider the qualities about the student that you can recommend. You do not need to address and assess all of your expectations regarding medical students. Focus on your student’s strengths.

Your silence can speak as loudly as your words.

Program directors can and will read in between the lines. If you worked with a student in a clinical setting but do not mention clinical skills they will assume these are not as strong.

**Be positive but don’t go overboard.**

Using a continuous barrage of superlatives may be met by skepticism. However, if you honestly feel that the student is the best student you have ever worked with make this clear with an explicit statement that can quantify the sentiment. For example: “In my 20 years of working with medical students at an academic medical center, XXX is the top student I have ever had the pleasure of supervising.”

**Be sure to include your title, academic rank and contact information in the letter.**

Programs will want the ability to assess your qualifications for recommending your student.

Most letters of recommendations fall into a relatively standard 4 paragraph format:

**Paragraph 1:**

This paragraph should state your pleasure at writing a letter and tell the program how you know your student. You may also include an overall summary statement of the student’s ability. Be aware of the
hierarchy: the best I have seen in 20 years > truly or simply outstanding > outstanding > excellent > very good > solid > qualified

Paragraph 2:
This paragraph is the meat of your letter and should include the reasons for your recommendation. Consider the attributes that your student demonstrates which will make them a valuable addition to a program. Again, consideration of ACGME competencies is helpful, as are specific examples and stories about your student.

Paragraph 3:
This optional paragraph can be used to highlight other characteristics of your student that may be helpful for the program to realize. It should NOT be used to review grades, step scores or extra-curricular activities that are available elsewhere in the student’s application unless you are able to add additional context to this information. For example, if your student is very involved in research you might be able to discuss how the student brings this skill set to patient care, using evidence-based medicine in a clinical setting. Similarly if your student has spent significant time and effort on volunteer work you can discuss the congruence of this work with their clinical performance and ability to empathize with patients.

You may also use this paragraph to help explain a challenge a student has met and provide additional information. If you have been working with a student who has clearly struggled but you have been impressed with their ability to reflect and move forward in the face of adversity, this is valuable information for the program. You do not need to highlight the struggle but rather the attributes of the student.

Paragraph 4
This closing paragraph should include an overall summary of the student’s performance, highlighting the strengths you have observed.

Tips:
- Offer to write a letter for students with whom you work closely when you provide feedback.
- Inform your students of the strengths that you can discuss. If you are unable to confidently recommend the student, let them know when they request the letter.
- Meet with your students immediately prior to writing the letter to review specifics of your time together.
- Details are important. Use letterhead, proofread the grammar very closely. Include the student AAMC ID number and the Letter ID from the ERAS coversheet in the letter. Please sign all letters.

Thank you for writing these important recommendations. Please contact us if you have any additional questions:

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