

How to Write a Letter of Recommendation for Medical School Admissions

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1. Importance:

As you probably know, the admissions process for medical school is extremely competitive.

In any given year, only around 40% of the students who apply are accepted. Even students who have strong grades and standardized test scores need excellent and convincing letters of recommendation in order to help them gain admission.

So a Letter of Recommendation is letter written by one of the medical staff that supervised on you for a period of time at **your mother school of medicine** or at **your electives abroad**(USA, UK,Germany,.....)

It tells the readers the opinions your supervisor had about your work, your personality, your achievements, etc. ...

It might be one of the requirements you need to meet when writing for some medical schools asking for electives, and then they should be written by Doctors from your own school of medicine.

It is one of the main goals you have to put in your mind to get when you are abroad doing clinical electives, research electives or observer ships.

So, LOR will help you getting electives first, and the ones you get from your

supervisors at electives will be a great tool to use when applying for your speciality.

2. How to get Started:

There are two ways to get a LOR:

1. First, you may simply ask your supervisor at your mother school or at your elective to give you a LOR. And in this case, he will be the one who will write the LOR for you.
2. The other way, is that some doctors says "O. I really want to help you get into medical school. Why don't you write the letter of rec and I'll sign it. That way it will emphasize exactly what you think is most important." This is the way that goes with your supervisors at your mother school.

Please, whether you were a supervisor or a student, DO NOT say "I can't write one more word. When am I going to find the time to do it? And what on earth am I supposed to say?"

This file helps you manage writing a LOR.

So Relax. We'll tell you what a recommender should say.

In fact, you can pass these tips on to your recommenders in case they prefer to write the letter themselves, but don't know what to say.

3. Guidelines to Help thinking about the task of writing LORs

- When a student asks you to write a letter of recommendation, know that you are not obligated to do so, and decide whether you can write enthusiastically enough to be helpful to the student.
Since the vast majority of recommendations are positive, those that are neutral are interpreted as negative and can impair a student's chances for admission.
If your honest evaluation may handicap a student, and if you are uncomfortable writing favorably, you have every right to decline a student's request for a letter.
- In writing, please:**be as specific as possible.**
General descriptions of a student's positive qualities are not as useful as detailed examples that illustrate the student's abilities and achievements. A statement like: "John is a brilliant thinker" is quite flattering, but it becomes more convincing if more details are added: "John is a brilliant thinker. For my class at Penn, he submitted an extraordinary fifty-page term paper on women and medicine in early modern England. After determining what practices were available to women in that period, he analyzed the representations of female physicians in the drama of the

English Renaissance. His literary interpretation was original and elegantly written.”

- This same level of specificity is important in **discussing non-academic matters too.**

Take, for instance, the following statement: “John’s commitment to the Narberth Ambulance Squad and to the people we serve is extraordinary.”

The medical schools would find this assessment all the more useful if more information were added, such as: “John’s commitment to the Narberth Ambulance Squad and to the people we serve is extraordinary. While most of our volunteers live within the township, John commutes 45 minutes each way from Philadelphia by bus and by train for each of his shifts. And his record of attendance is perfect. This conscientious behavior is typical of the way he conducts himself.”

- Try to **compare the student to others you have known in a similar capacity.**

Statements like, “In terms of intellectual talent and drive, John ranks in the top 10% of all undergraduate students I have taught over the past seven years,” can help an admissions committee place your recommendation into a broader context.

- **Admissions committees often interpret omissions of relevant information as implicitly negative.**

For example, if you praise a student’s academic work but say nothing about him/her as a person, an admissions officer may conclude that the student is smart but socially inept.

Therefore, it is ideal to try to touch on the following topics in any letter of recommendation:

The student’s intellectual strengths, level of motivation, personal character, commitment to medicine, and interpersonal skills.

Of course, your ability to comment on these topics will vary depending on how you know the student.

- Statements that are negative or refer to problems can jeopardize a student’s candidacy.

A comment like, “John is sometimes abrasive, but I don’t think he ever means to be rude,” or “John worked hard but his exams were never quite up to snuff,” can give an admissions committee pause.

If you have serious concerns about a student, whether of an academic or personal nature, then it may be better to ask the student to look elsewhere for a recommendation.

- If you wish to give a thoughtful evaluation of a student’s weaknesses (as well as his/her strengths), please try to **couple it with an explanation** of how they will not interfere with the student’s ability to perform well in medical school.

- **Please omit references to the student’s appearance, as they trivialize the recommendation.**

If you want to discuss personal charm, which is frequently a relevant asset, describe its effect on others. For example: “John’s warmth and sense of

humor naturally draw others toward him and help make him a welcome participant in our laboratory's weekly meetings.”

- Unless the student requests otherwise, please **do not address your letter to a particular medical school.**

In most cases, your letter will be sent to every medical school to which the student applies.

- Federal law stipulates that **students can see letters of recommendation unless they waive their right in advance.**

The student's decision as to whether your letter will be confidential or non-confidential will be designated on the form he or she gives to you.

Most students choose to waive their right, since the medical schools generally find confidential letters to be more convincing and compelling.

However, if you, as the author of a confidential letter, wish to show a copy to the student, that is absolutely your right.

- Please **Please type your letter of recommendation.**

You may type it directly onto the recommendation form, or print it onto a separate page and attach it to the form.

4. 10 Tips for Recommenders that Supervisors Use when Writing LORs :

0. Review a copy of the applicant's personal statement so that your letter of recommendation can dovetail with--not conflict with or duplicate--the rest of the application.
1. Ask the applicant to supply you with additional information like a résumé.
2. Describe your qualifications for comparing the applicant to other applicants.
 - I have been teaching for twenty years and have advised approximately 450 students on independent research projects over the last five years.
 - I have personally supervised ten interns every summer for the last five years plus worked with over two hundred college students in the Big Medical Center ER.
3. Discuss how well you know the applicant.
 - I was able to get to know Mr. Doe because he made it a point to attend two of my sections every week when only one was required.
 - Ms. Smith did research in my laboratory for two years, and I worked very closely with her.
4. Choose two to three qualities that you observed in the applicant.
 - Jane has a rare blend of top research, analytical, and interpersonal skills.
 - The combination of tenacity, willingness to help, and good communications skills found in Mr. Doe is truly unique.

5. In discussing those qualities, support your statements with specific instances in which he or she demonstrated those attributes. Be as concrete and detailed as possible
 - He is the only student I ever had who came to all my office hours as part of a relentless--and successful--drive to master biochemistry. He was one of just ten percent in the class to receive an A.
 - Because of Jane's research and communications skills, I didn't hesitate to ask her to monitor epileptic patients and prepare electrodes to be implanted in their bilateral temporal lobes. Her quality work contributed significantly to a paper we co-authored and presented to the Society for Neuroscience.
6. Try to quantify the student's strengths or rank him or her vis-à-vis other applicants that you have observed.
 - He was in the top 10% of his class.
 - • She has the best research skills of any person her age that I have ever supervised.
7. Avoid generalities and platitudes.
8. Include some mild criticism, typically the flip-side of a strength
 - The only fault I have encountered in him is his retiring nature. His modesty sometimes hides a young man of remarkable sensitivity and broad interests.
 - Occasionally, her fortitude and persistence can turn into stubbornness, but usually her good nature and level-headedness prevail.
9. Discuss the applicant's potential in his or her chosen field.
 - I enthusiastically recommend Mr. Doe to your medical program. This well-rounded student will be a fine, compassionate doctor.
 - With her exceptional interpersonal and research skills, Ms. Smith will be an outstanding doctor and a credit to the medical school she attends.

5. Letter of Recommendation Template

[University Letter Head] (If requested by the student)

[Sender's Name]

[Sender's Address, Line 1]

[Sender's Address, Line 2]

[Sender's Phone Number]

[Sender's Fax Number]

[Sender's E-mail Address]

[Today's Date]

[Recipient's Name]

[Recipient's Address, Line 1]

[Recipient's Address, Line 2]

Dear [Recipient's Name] or To Whom it May Concern,

It is my pleasure to recommend Jane Doe for admission to [name of program] at [name of university]. I am a fifth year Ph.D. student at the University of California, Berkeley. I came to know Jane when I was her Graduate Student Instructor for Philosophy 111: Ethical Relativism, taught by Professor John Doe. The course comprised [short description of course]. Jane distinguished herself by submitting an exceptionally well researched and interesting project on ethical practices in ancient Greece. I would rank her in the top 2% of students that I have taught in the past five years in respect of her writing ability and research skills.

Overall, Jane is highly intelligent and has good analytical skills. Her project on ethical practices in ancient Greece demonstrated her ability to come a detailed understanding of the ethical practices of another, very different culture, and to analyze the consequences of those practices for contemporary ethical theories. She gave a particularly interesting discussion of the difficult practice of infanticide, and showed both sensitivity and detachment when discussing its ethical consequences. Her overall intelligence is also reflected in her grades for the course, which were by far the best in the class.

Jane has excellent communication skills. Her written work is both clear and concise, and interesting to read. She demonstrated her oral articulateness in the discussion sections that were an integral part of the course. Each discussion section focused on a particular ethical dilemma. Students were required analyze morally problematic situations, and to develop and argue for their own ethical views with regard to the issue in question. Jane was highly proficient in applying the course material in analyzing the problem situations. She always explained her views very concisely and gave supporting arguments that were both clear and persuasive. Jane also demonstrated good team working skills in group assignments.

At a personal level, Jane is a well disciplined, industrious student with a pleasant personality. She went well beyond the course requirements in the quantity and quality of her project, putting in a lot of extra research and attending office hours every week. Throughout the course, Jane demonstrated great perseverance and initiative. She was not only interested in and motivated to learn the material, but put great work into assimilating it to her own experience and developing her own ideas about each ethical topic that we discussed.

Jane is unquestionably an exceptional candidate for graduate study in Ethics. Jane's work in Philosophy 111 suggests that she would greatly benefit from the opportunities for intellectual development provided by a sustained period of graduate study. She has proven herself to have the perseverance and initiative, and the intellectual creativity necessary to complete an advanced graduate degree. I would therefore highly recommend Jane Doe. If her performance in my class is a good indication of how she would perform as a graduate student, she would be an extremely positive asset to your program.

If I can be of any further assistance, or provide you with any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Sender's Name and Title]

6. Sample Letters of Recommendation for Medical School:

Sample 1 (PDF – Download)

Sample 2:

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am professor at Shenyang Medical University of China, and was Ms. Olivia Li's Advisor for her graduation thesis. Now I am pleased to recommend her to your Ph.D. program in Pharmaceutics.

During the one-year period while Ms. Li worked with me on her thesis project, she impressed me deeply as a highly motivated, goal-oriented student of lively personality and creativity. She was a member of our research group for a project I was in charge of in developing a sustained release preparation for a compound herbal medicine. Since part of the compound substance was volatile, the project temporarily came to a halt. Ms. Li tackled the problem, under my direction, and thus assumed an important role in the research team. She spent many hours looking up technical literature, and proposed a novel solution with satisfying results. All along, I found Ms. Li a fine research worker of uncompromising scientific rigor and adventurous spirit. She has also demonstrated a solid

educational background and a remarkable ability in lab experimentation. In addition, she has an excellent command of English, which is rather uncommon among undergraduate students. She can read professional journals and documents in English without any problem, and can carry a conversation with native speakers of English easily.

As her teacher and former Advisor, I am proud of Ms. Li for her academic achievements. She certainly stands out as a student of great potential. Since the study and research in Pharmaceutics in China are still below international standards, I personally believe that it will be to Ms. Li's best interest to enter a graduate degree program in Pharmaceutics in a technologically advanced country. And I have no doubt that Ms. Li will take full advantage of this precious opportunity to make herself a first-rate pharmacist.

Finally, I again recommend this student of mine, in view of her remarkable academic potential and positive personality, to your graduate program. Ms. Li has my wholehearted support.

Yours Sincerely

Sample 3:

Letter of Recommendation for MIPT Alumnus (01/2000) The Biophysics Student admitted to Caltech, MIT, Princeton

Applicant: Irina I. Ivanova

Recommender: Dr. Petr P. Petrov

It is my pleasure to write a letter of recommendation on behalf of Irina Ivanova. I have known her since 1998, when she started to work as a research assistant under my guidance. For more than a year I have close experience of Irina's work and can state unequivocally that her academic and professional skills place her in the top 5% of the students I have worked with during my 50 years of work at Lebedev Physics Institute of Russian Academy of Sciences.

Some of the main credits of Irina are her persistence and diligence sometimes even ranging with obsession with work. I will give you an example. When I first met Irina in September 1998 she was a 4th year student at MIPT and possessed a solid background in physics and mathematics, though she lacked some knowledge in biology and chemistry necessary for successful research in the field of biophysical kinetics which our laboratory is primary concerned with. It took her only a few months to read a rather large number of books and articles in Russian as well as in English and become proficient in this field. From that time she started to attend extra-curriculum lectures and seminars on different topics in

biophysics (such as Biophysics of Membrane Processes, Biochemical Physics, Physical aspects of Biological Processes) at MIPT as well as at Moscow State University.

I must admit that now Irina possesses a unique combination of solid academic knowledge in physics, chemistry, biology and mathematical methods. In scientific discussions and during colloquia Irina revealed maturity, excellent analytical thinking and clarity of thought. She often proposed original ideas and made outstanding conclusions.

As a member of our laboratory Irina investigated permeability of erythrocyte membrane for glucose and oxygen in normal conditions and under pressure. This was an important part of our major research concerning influence of pressure on permeability of cytoplasmic membranes. Irina took part in construction of theoretical model and then carried out a lot of independent research. I should mention her accuracy and thoroughness in carrying out experiments and an ability to pay attention to nuances, which often play crucial role. Her findings were very important for confirmation of our theory of structure of cytoplasmic membrane. As a result of this work in June 1999 Irina successfully defended her thesis and got BS with Honors. Recently she has reported these results at Biophysics section of MIPT Scientific Conference. This report was made at the top level.

In summary, Irina distinguished herself as an individual who exhibits an organized, scientific approach to research, and with a high degree of motivation, innovation and initiative, can accomplish her goals. Therefore, I evaluate Irina Ivanova as a person with high potential to carry out an advanced study in the field of biophysics and strongly recommend her for further education at Biophysics Department of California Institute of Technology.

Petr P. Petrov, D.Sc. 12/07/99
Professor, Lebedev Physics Institute RAS
Leninskii prospekt 51, Moscow, Russia
Tel. 7(095)555-5555

Sample 4

Sample reference letter from a hospital administrator for a Chief of Psychology Service seeking a new position: (names are fictitious)

To Whom It May Concern:

This serves as a letter of reference for Dr. Martin Kaye, Ph.D., who has applied for an administrative position at your company, Healthcare Systems. It is my honor to recommend Dr. Kaye. I have known him since January 1994. I became his administrative supervisor upon my employment at County Medical Center.

Dr. Kaye has been the Chief of Psychology Service here for ten years. He has demonstrated outstanding talents in both administrative/ managerial as well as clinical practice spheres. He has a reputation as a superb manager of the mental health program at this center.

Revealing of his administrative abilities, Dr. Kaye took the initiative to significantly enlarge the substance abuse treatment program (in-patient, day hospital, and outpatient) and the mental health outpatient clinic program. He was able to greatly increase staffing and funding for these services. Consequently the hospital was able to construct an entire new building, devoted exclusively to these programs, a few years ago. As Chief of the Psychology Service, Dr. Kaye has demonstrated uncanny skill in selection of staff and interns. These employees and trainees continue to practice successfully to this day.

Dr. Kaye has also distinguished himself as a superb clinician, working in his profession over two decades: ten years here and ten years in a previous, similar setting. His competence, compassion and ethics as a psychologist are exemplary. In providing a broad spectrum of psychological assessment and treatment, he has more than proven his ability to lead a large and complex mental health care system.

As a clinician, Dr. Kaye also devoted much time recently to developing an outstanding Anger Management Program, a special area of interest which has become in demand in modern American society for obvious reasons. His skill diagnosing and treating Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and other disorders is remarkable. He regularly lectures on these topics to other mental health professionals. Dr. Kaye also provides excellent consultations to inpatient psychiatry and medical-surgical units of this center.

His commitment to education and teaching is highlighted by his early development of the Psychology Internship Program for trained individuals who have completed coursework to qualify for doctoral degrees in psychology. In this capacity he had to develop a seminar curriculum, schedule clinical assignments, arrange for supervision (by himself and others), and coordinate with their doctoral departments at several universities. The supplementary services of these interns do greatly benefit the medical center and its patients. This program had to gain official approval by the American Psychological Association; it thus affords much prestige for our medical center in addition to providing required training for future licensed psychologists.

I am deeply impressed by Dr. Kaye and recommend him unhesitatingly. I am confident that, if selected for your vacancy, he would provide the same high level of service and commitment. If you have any questions or wish to speak further about Dr. Kaye, please feel free to call me at 443-887-2345.

Sincerely,
Donald Stern, Ph.D.

7. Phrases to use:

- Dr. XXXXX is bright, and hard working.
- His medical knowledge is superb; His clinical evaluation, judgment, and management are all excellent above and beyond the level of his colleagues.
- He is persistent regarding the care of his patients: to search, diagnose, treat and overall provide the best and comforting care which puts him at a level hard to achieve at his age.
- His clinical assessment and plan is outstanding, spontaneous, expeditious, unhesitating and prompt. He is studious and diligent.
- He keeps his knowledge up to date with the latest clinical developments through his extensive journal readings and Medline literature search.
- Dr. XXXXX is neat, handsome, and easy going; he is courteous, and a very pleasant person to work with; he has excellent relationship with his colleagues and nursing staff.
- I have enjoyed working with him and I am sure that he will be an asset to your program.
- I am writing to you on behalf of Dr. XXXXX who graduated fromUniversity Medical School in February 2004 with a very good appreciation M.D. Degree.
- I know Dr. XXXXX as a student in the department of at University Hospital.
- I am writing to you on behalf of Dr. XXXXX who was a medical Student in the Department of at university Hospital.
- I knew him very closely when he started his clinical studies.
- During schooling and externship in department he proved to be neat, punctual, ready to learn, hard working and caring about his patients.
- He has an excellent character with good relationships with his colleagues, nursing staff, and patients.
- His medical knowledge and judgment is excellent, and he is an extremely hard worker, intelligent, responsive to teaching, happy in his work and get well with the faculty. Moreover, He is very considerate, charming & cheerful pleasant young man.
- Enthusiastic, studious and eager to learn.
- He is a hardworking person with very good medical knowledge and judgment.
- to be more specific I am pleased to tell you that Dr. XXXXX worked under my supervision and he shared in the evaluation and treatment of many cases such as and.
- In addition, he shared in the evaluation and management of in-patient, out-patient cases of
- I do recommend Dr. XXXXX to receive every consideration in his future at any program he will apply for.

- In conclusion, I highly support his application for any postgraduate position in USA.
- For any further questions, please contact me.
- For any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.