



## **Faculty & Community Members: Letter Writing Guidelines for Professional Healthcare Schools**

First of all, thank you in advance for your important role in supporting OSU students and alumni who aspire to become future health care professionals. Often it can be difficult to write a quality letter of evaluation (*recommendation*) for students when given little guidance about how your evaluation is utilized by professional schools in the healthcare application process.

These guidelines below are designed to help facilitate the writing process and provide you helpful information and tips on how to:

- ✓ Format the letter
- ✓ Highlight your knowledge of an OSU student applicant
- ✓ Submit the letter

Professional Schools do not expect any *one* letter writer to provide information pertaining to *every* characteristic or speak to all qualities of an applicant. Please note that the use of these guidelines are optional and not intended to prescribe your writing methods.

### Letter of Evaluation (*Recommendation*) Format Tips:

Please be sure to:

1. Write your letter of recommendation on **official letterhead**.
2. Include your **contact information**: telephone number, email address, office location.
3. **Sign** the letter.
4. **Save signed letter as a PDF**. The majority of professional schools utilize various centralized, online application system services for their professional application submission. Often the application portals require/offer an electronic, digital letter of recommendation submission option for the letter writer to directly upload. Most application portals *recommend* a PDF format when uploading the letter.

### Letter of Evaluation (*Recommendation*) Writing Tips:

1. **Address your initial greeting in the letter with a general format** (not a specific, individual name of a professional program or admissions committee). *Why?*  
Many individual letters are read by multiple, *separate* professional school admissions committees *if* the candidate is applying to more than one professional school. Overall, it is best to address your letter in a more general manner. (e.g., Dear Admissions Committee, To Whom It May Concern, etc.)
2. Provide an accurate **assessment of the applicant's suitability for professional school** (medical, dental, optometry, etc.) rather than advocate for the applicant or focus the letter on your personal credentials.
3. Briefly **explain your relationship** to the applicant and consider:
  - How long have you known the individual?
  - Capacity you have interacted with them (faculty, supervisor, etc.).
  - Are you are writing based on direct or indirect observations?

4. **Quality is more important** than the length of the letter.
5. **Only include information on grades, GPA or MCAT (or other professional exam required) *if* you are providing context to help interpret them.** Remember – grades, GPA and MCAT (or other professional exam required) are already available within the application for the admissions committee.
6. **Focus on behaviors that you have observed directly** when describing applicants suitability for professional school. Please review the “Core, Entry-Level Competencies” below for some ways to *brainstorm* your specific, evaluative letter content.
7. Admissions committees find comparison information helpful. ***If* you make comparisons, please be sure to provide context** and include information about:
  - The comparison group. (e.g., students in a class you taught, students in your department, co-workers, etc.)
  - Your rationale for the final comparison.

### **Areas of Interest to Health Professional Schools**

Professional School Admissions Committees find great value in:

- Unique contributions to the incoming class.
- Describing obstacles that the student has had to overcome, and if applicable, how those obstacles led to new learning and self-growth.
- Explain how the applicant may contribute to a professional schools diversity, broadly defined. (e.g., background, attributes, experiences, etc.)

### **Core, Entry-Level Competencies:**

- Thinking and Reasoning Competencies – critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, scientific inquiry and written communication abilities.
- Science Competencies – abilities to apply knowledge in the living systems and human behavior.
- Interpersonal Competencies – service orientation, social skills, cultural competency, teamwork and oral communication abilities.
- Intrapersonal Competencies – ethical responsibility to self and others, reliability and dependability, resilience and adaptability, capacity for improvement.

*For full context, please review the “Additional Sources” below.*

### **Letter of Evaluation (Recommendation) Submission Tips:**

1. Often it is a very straight-forward process to quickly upload your completed letter. Please have a brief conversation with your candidate about **which professional schools and/or application portals** that you will *likely* be submitting/uploading their letter of recommendation to online. (Note: the majority of schools nationally use electronic, online submission through a professional application portal).
2. Please **ask your candidate to email you the brief instructions/overview of what to expect** when the letter of recommendation application request(s) arrives to you digitally via email submission (*or* a different method) per individual professional school instructions. Note: there *may* be more than one request ***IF*** your candidate is applying through multiple application portals or schools.

3. Ensure you are both on the same page: **ask for a timeline/expectation of a deadline** the letter needs to be completed to submit online (or other format if requested).
4. Ask for the candidate to email correspond with you (or what you prefer) to ensure that you know the request is coming per your timeline conversation so you can be on the lookout for this individual request.

Additional Tips:

- ✓ Please be sure to **change your e-mail setting/filter and check your junk mail**. This is to ensure the online, emailed official letter of recommendation request directly from the application portal (*not* the student) does not inadvertently end up in your junk mail versus your inbox.
- ✓ Please **do not ask the student to upload the letter on your behalf** as the instructions of the professional application portals do not allow this.
- ✓ As a courtesy, **please consider a follow-up communication with the candidate once your submission has been completed**. Often candidates may professionally follow-up when appropriate. Please keep in mind that it is a very lengthy process for the candidate to apply to professional school. Taking this courtesy step is often greatly appreciated to ensure a smooth submission in a timely manner.
- ✓ Note: Once you have uploaded the letter via the provided instructions, candidates often can directly log-in and check their own application portal to ensure it did arrive safely within a few business days or with the individual professional school (*if* the professional school does not use an online national application portal).
- ✓ Want to learn more about the application portals? Please review our *free* resources at: [Preprofessional.okstate.edu](http://Preprofessional.okstate.edu)  
Select: "Pre-Health," the *specific* healthcare field and review the "Application Services" section to familiarize yourself with the instructions provided to you by the applicant.

Note: Guidelines provided *adapted* from the [AAMC Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant](#)

Additional Sources:

[AAMC Holistic Review in Medical School Admissions](#)

[AAMC Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students](#)



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