

# Writing a Good Letter of Recommendation

The letter of recommendation (LOR) is an important aspect of the medical student's application for residency. In general, an academic reference should highlight the student's aptitude, curiosity and ability to perform in their chosen specialty. Additionally, the LOR should communicate important attributes (knowledge, skills and attitude) that are not necessarily gained by looking over the student's test scores, transcripts and CV.

## General Guidelines

A good LOR includes:

- Specific qualifications and strengths
- Accomplishments related to the specialty for which they're applying
- Detailed skills that are of import to the specialty or medicine in general
- A description of the nature and length of your relationship with the student

## Tips for writing a good LOR

- Put yourself in the shoes of the residency program director – what would you be seeking?
- Compare the student with others you have worked with
- Share impactful stories that illustrate the student's strengths and qualities
- Reflect on various aspects of your student's attributes (medical knowledge, patient care, interpersonal communication, professionalism, evidence-based practice)

## Practical considerations

- Request a copy of the AAMC LOR/cover sheet. This indicates if the student has waived their right to see the letter and includes their AAMC ID# (which should be included in the letter)
- Submit your letter on official letterhead
- Proofread your letter – especially the student's name
- Agree on a due date with your student
- Keep a hard and electronic copy of your letter so it can be updated for future requests
- Email the student once you have submitted the letter

## Anatomy of a good LOR

**Salutation** – address the letter to “Dear Program Director” and include the student's AAMC ID# in the subject line.

**1<sup>st</sup> paragraph** – Introduce yourself and state the purpose of the letter. The second sentence should convey your relation to the medical student and the length of that relationship.

**2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph** – Describe the medical student's character traits, accomplishments and performance and include specific illustrations and examples that may be of interest to the student's chosen specialty.

**4<sup>th</sup> paragraph** – Reiterate the strength of your overall recommendation. Communicate whether you would recruit this student if you were a residency director.