

AAMC Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant

Thank you for agreeing to write a letter of evaluation for a medical school applicant!

The following guidelines aim to improve the letter writing process in order to benefit both letter writers and admissions committees. They are organized into two sections that describe (1) **tips about how to write a letter** and (2) **key areas of interest to medical schools**.

How to use the guidelines

Please note that use of these guidelines is optional. They are intended to help you think about your letter and facilitate the writing process.

Medical schools do not expect any one letter writer to provide information about every characteristic of an applicant. In fact, they require multiple letters specifically because no one letter writer is expected to know everything about an applicant.

Guidelines

1. Provide an accurate assessment of the applicant's suitability for medical school rather than advocate for the applicant.
2. Briefly explain your relationship with the applicant;
 - how long you have known the applicant;
 - in what capacity you have interacted (e.g. faculty, pre-medical advisor, supervisor, etc.); and
 - whether you are writing based on direct or indirect observations.
3. Quality is more important than letter length. Focus on the applicant rather than details about the lab, course, assignment, job or institution.
4. **Only** include information on grades, GPA, or MCAT *if* you are providing context to help interpret them. Grades, GPA and MCAT scores are available within the application.
5. Focus on behaviors that you have observed directly when describing applicants' suitability for medical school. Consider describing:
 - The situation or context of the behavior
 - The actual behavior(s) you observed
 - Any consequences of that behavior.
6. Admissions committees find comparison information helpful. If you make comparisons, be sure to provide context. 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

Key Areas of Interest

A.) Unique Contributions to the Incoming Class

-Describe obstacles that the applicant had to overcome, and if applicable, how those obstacles led to new learning and growth.

-Explain how the applicant may contribute to a medical school's diversity, broadly defined (e.g. background, attributes, experiences, etc.)

Note: if you write about any information that could be considered potentially sensitive, confirm with the applicant that s/he is comfortable with the inclusion of that information.

B.) Core, Entry-level Competencies

Describe how the applicant has, or has not, demonstrated **any** of the following competencies that are necessary for success in medical school:

Thinking and Reasoning Competencies

- ✓ *Critical Thinking*- Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems
- ✓ *Quantitative Reasoning*- Applies quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world.
- ✓ *Scientific Inquiry*- Applies knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems and formulate research questions and hypotheses; is facile in the language of the sciences and uses it to participate in the discourse of science and explain how scientific knowledge is discovered and validated
- ✓ *Written Communication*- Effectively conveying information to others using written words and sentences

Science Competencies

- ✓ *Living Systems*- Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems
- ✓ *Human Behavior*- Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, social, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.

Interpersonal Competencies

- ✓ *Service Orientation*- Demonstrates a desire to help others and sensitivity to others' needs and feelings; demonstrates a desire to alleviate others' distress; recognizes and acts on his/her responsibilities to society, locally, nationally and globally.
- ✓ *Social Skills*- Demonstrates awareness of others' needs, goals, feelings, and the ways social and behavioral cues affect peoples' interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; and treats others with respect.
- ✓ *Cultural Competence*- Demonstrates knowledge of social and cultural factors that affect interactions and behaviors; shows an appreciation and respect for multiple dimensions of diversity; recognizes and acts on the obligation to inform one's own judgment; engages diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work; recognizes and appropriately addresses bias in themselves and others; interacts effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.
- ✓ *Teamwork*- Works collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals; shares information & knowledge with others and provides feedback; puts team goals ahead of individual goals.
- ✓ *Oral Communication*- Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; listens effectively; recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.

Intrapersonal Competencies

- ✓ *Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others*- Behaves in an honest and ethical manner; cultivates personal and academic integrity; adheres to ethical principles and follows rules and procedures; resists peer pressure to engage in unethical behavior and encourages others to behave in honest and ethical ways; and develops and demonstrates ethical and moral reasoning.
- ✓ *Reliability and Dependability*- Consistently fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; takes responsibility for personal actions and performance.
- ✓ *Resilience and Adaptability*- Demonstrates tolerance of stressful or changing environments or situations and adapts effectively to them; is persistent, even under difficult situations; recovers from setbacks.
- ✓ *Capacity for Improvement*- Sets goals for continuous improvement and for learning new concepts and skills; engages in reflective practice for improvement, solicits and responds appropriately to feedback.

A Special Note for Writers of Committee Letters

Medical Schools value committee letters because they provide an integrated and institutional perspective on an applicant's readiness for medical school. They provide a comprehensive evaluation of applicants based on direct observation and the synthesis of information provided by faculty and others at an institution. This integrated perspective provides unique and valuable information about applicants.

While we recognize that many committee letters already incorporate the concepts included in these guidelines and key areas of interest, we believe that the material provided here can only complement the current committee letter process by enhancing its effectiveness. Those who work with individual letter writers can use these guidelines and key areas of interest as educational tools to encourage greater focus in individual letters. Writers of committee letters may also wish to re-fashion the overarching committee letter produced by their school to more closely reflect the central points provided here.