

A top-down photograph of a desk setup. On the left, a pair of black-rimmed glasses rests on a white keyboard. A silver pen lies horizontally across the center. To the right, a yellow folder or notebook is partially visible. The background is a light, neutral color.

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 guidelines are intended to enhance the letter-writing process by providing a general framework of best practices and relevant content for letter writers to follow. They are optional and can be applied to both individual and committee letters.

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 have you known the applicant?
 - In what capacity have you interacted (e.g., faculty, premedical advisor, supervisor)?
 - Are your observations of the applicant direct or indirect?
3. Quality of information is more important than letter length. Focus on the applicant rather than details of the lab, course, assignment, job, or institution.
4. Only include information on grades, GPA, or MCAT scores *if* you also provide context to help interpret them. Grades, GPA, and MCAT scores are available within the application.
5. Focus on behaviors you have observed directly when describing an applicant's suitability for medical school. Consider describing:
 - The situation or context of the behaviors.
 - The actual behaviors you observed.
 - Any consequences of the behaviors.
6. Ask the applicant for permission if you plan to include any information that could be considered potentially private or sensitive.
7. Consider including unique contributions that an applicant would bring to an incoming class, such as:
 - Obstacles that the applicant had to overcome and how those obstacles have led to new learning and growth.
 - The applicant's background and lived experiences that demonstrate their one-of-a-kind perspective.
8. 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).
 - Your rationale for the comparison.

Premed Competencies

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

Professional Competencies

Commitment to Learning and Growth: Practices continuous personal and professional growth for improvement, including setting and communicating goals for learning and development; reflects on successes, challenges, and mistakes; pursues opportunities to improve knowledge and understanding; and asks for and incorporates feedback to learn and grow.

Empathy and Compassion: Recognizes, understands, and acknowledges others' experiences, feelings, perspectives, and reactions to situations; is sensitive to others' needs and feelings; and demonstrates a desire to help others and alleviate others' distress.

Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others: Behaves with honesty and integrity; considers multiple and/or conflicting principles and values to inform decisions; adheres to ethical principles when carrying out professional obligations; resists pressure to engage in unethical behavior; and encourages others to behave honestly and ethically.

Interpersonal Skills: Demonstrates an awareness of how social and behavioral cues affect people's interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; recognizes and manages one's emotions and understands how emotions impact others or a situation; and treats others with dignity, courtesy, and respect.

Oral Communication: Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; actively listens to understand the meaning and intent behind what others say; and recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.

Reliability and Dependability: Demonstrates accountability for performance and responsibilities to self and others; prioritizes and fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; and understands consequences of not fulfilling one's responsibilities to self and others.

Resilience and Adaptability: Perseveres in challenging, stressful, or ambiguous environments or situations by adjusting behavior or approach in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles, and recognizes and seeks help and support when needed; recovers from and reflects on setbacks; and balances personal well-being with responsibilities.

Self-Awareness: Reflects on personal assumptions and how they may influence interactions; considers situations or ideas from alternative viewpoints; willing to revise one's thinking when new information or insights emerge; and helps create an environment where all individuals feel respected and able to contribute.

Service Orientation: Shows a commitment to something larger than oneself; demonstrates dedication to service and a commitment to making meaningful contributions that meet the needs of communities.

Teamwork and Collaboration: Collaborates with others to achieve shared goals and prioritizes shared goals; adjusts role between team member and leader based on one's own and others' expertise and experience; shares information with team members and encourages this behavior in others; and gives and accepts feedback to improve team performance.

Understanding Others: Understands that people's experiences and backgrounds influence their behaviors and interactions; shows respect for individual differences; and demonstrates curiosity about how others see and make sense of the world.

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 conveys information to others using written words and sentences.

Science Competencies

Human Behavior: Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, socio-cultural, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.

Living Systems: Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems including biomolecules, molecules, cells, and organs.

Additional Information

To access the Letters of Evaluation Guidelines on our website, please visit: aamc.org/advisors.

To learn more about the Competencies for Entering Medical Students, please visit: aamc.org/competencies.