

Guidelines for Medical School Letters of Evaluation

These guidelines were prepared to help evaluators structure their letters to emphasize the information that medical schools need to select future physicians, which is not entirely the same as choosing graduate students. The issue is health care, not research, so applicants must be able to deal with patients as well as understand the basics of medical science. The general categories below reflect this. You may not be in a position to comment upon every facet discussed below, but it is helpful to know what they are. Please feel free to consult with me [Janis Champay] if you have any questions.

- * Provide the student's full name and AAMC number on the letter.

- * Describe the nature of your relationship to the applicant, how well, and for how long you have known him or her.

Discuss what you can of the following topics, using concrete examples or personal knowledge.

- * Motivation, discipline.

How responsible, determined, focused is the applicant? Did she have to work to get where she is or support herself financially? Overcome personal struggles? Was his preparation for college weak and he had to catch up? Was an appropriate amount of initiative taken in designing an independent lab project or other student-driven assignment? Did he or she go beyond the required reading? Was needed advice sought out, and how was criticism taken? How well were suggestions for paper or thesis revisions handled? Is the student a leader or a follower? Do you know of any tangible examples of commitment to people, to health care?

- * Personal aptitude for a health professions career.

To what degree does the applicant demonstrate personal qualities such as integrity, honesty, maturity, empathy, kindness, altruism? How are his/her social skills? Degree of social/cultural awareness? How did the person interact with faculty, lab group members, or conference participants? What about written or oral communication skills? Did the applicant contribute to conferences in a way that assisted in effective discussion, or did he or she take over? Did the student work well with lab partners and fulfill responsibilities to the group's efforts?

- * Academic strengths and weaknesses not obviously evident from the record.

What are the applicant's intellectual capabilities? Performance on thesis orals or in other unusually demanding situations? Can you comment on the degree of intellectual depth and rigor in the student's choice of courses? Broad or narrow interests, level of general curiosity and likelihood of being a lifelong learner? Mention unusual or particularly pertinent features of the course(s) (e.g. some graduate level material; group learning activities; oral presentations; independent work). If you are comfortable with giving a ranking, do so, or note the average course grade or if the applicant excels at a certain kind of thinking or analysis.

* How comfortable would you be having the applicant as your physician? Can you compare the applicant to others you know who have gone into medicine?

11.17.10