



# 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.
  - Contributions that an applicant would bring to a medical school's diversity, broadly defined (e.g., background, attributes, experiences).
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.

## 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*

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**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*

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**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.

### *Pre-professional Competencies*

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**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 their 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. 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 and 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.

**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. 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.

## Additional Information

To access the Letters of Evaluation Guidelines on our website, please visit: [aamc.org/advisors](https://www.aamc.org/advisors).

To learn more about the Competencies for Entering Medical Students, please visit: [aamc.org/competencies](https://www.aamc.org/competencies).