

ERAS Letter of Recommendations Guidelines and Best Practices

Important: *If you cannot write a supportive letter of recommendation (e.g., if you did not work with the student very long or did not have a favorable experience), please let the student know that he/she should request a letter from someone else.*

Letter writers may begin uploading Letters of Recommendation (LOR's) for residency applicants when ERAS (Electronic Residency Application Service) opens for the next application cycle, traditionally in June at the beginning of the student's third year. Since applicants gain access to have LOR's uploaded on their behalf at the start of their third year clinical rotations, it is suggested that you draft the letter while the student's performance is fresh in your memory rather than waiting until they actually submit their applications to residency programs at the beginning of fourth year. It is highly recommended that letters be submitted by September 1 of the year preceding the next Match cycle (e.g., by 9/1/19 when the application opens for the 2020 Match).

Please note that per ERAS policy (as well as how the electronic system is programmed), LOR's for all applicants must be uploaded to ERAS using the [ERAS Letter of Recommendation Portal](#) (LoRP) and must be uploaded by either the LOR author or his/her designee only. The student's medical school ERAS Office (aka, "Designated Dean's Office") is not able to upload letters of recommendation, no exceptions.

To help you in preparing a strong LOR, you may ask the student to provide you with a current CV and the personal statement that the student is writing for his/her application to residency. You may also want to discuss with the student his/her goals and aspirations, and specific strengths the applicant believes he/she will bring to a residency program and the profession of medicine.

There are three important components to a compelling letter of recommendation:

1. Your assessment of the student's strengths, preferably from working directly with him or her;
2. Your assessment of how the student will perform as a resident and future member of that specialty;
3. Anything that may distinguish this applicant from others.

Guidelines for Writing Letters Most Valuable to Residency Programs

- **Limit your letter to one or two pages.** The strongest letters include at least three paragraphs. Length of the letter may be interpreted by some programs as a measure of strength of the recommendation, although some may specify "one page or less" (such as the military).
- **Explain how you know the applicant and your relationship.** Do you know this applicant from an academic, clinical, or research setting? State how long have you known the applicant and how well.
- **Tailor your letter.** Give the reader a sense of the applicant's potential as a future physician, as well as in other areas on which you can comment (e.g., research, advocacy, their chosen specialty). Specific areas to comment on include: intellectual ability; analytical skills; attitude toward learning; communication skills; initiative, motivation, and persistence; and personal achievements. Highlight ACGME core competencies where possible.

Guidelines (cont'd)

- **Be specific.** Give specific examples of your observation of the student, or stories about your experiences with them that reflect his/her potential, professionalism, clinical acumen, interpersonal and leadership skills, passion for medicine, etc. When possible, include statistics (e.g., “Ms. Jones is among the top 5% of students with whom I have worked,” etc.)
- **In describing any weaknesses or gaps:** Consider whether you can frame them positively (e.g., “demonstrated improvement in documentation” rather than “needs some work on their documentation skills”).
- **Avoid personal remarks.** Do not mention age, race/ethnicity, marital status, children, physical characteristics, or other personal attributes. Especially do not include Personal Health Information or any struggles with physical or mental health concerns, including treatments, medications, or other health-related considerations.
- **Conclude with an overall recommendation.** Indicate how well qualified the student is for residency and as a future physician. Comment on whether you would select this applicant for a residency program.
- **Add that you welcome requests for information.** Include your contact information if it is not already included on the letterhead.
- **Carefully proofread your letter.** Pay particular attention to the spelling of the applicant’s name. If you are using a template, ensure that you have changed the name throughout the letter.

Additional Instructions for Format and Uploading

1. Address the letter to “Dear Program Director,”
2. Include the student’s AAMC ID number somewhere on the letter.
3. Again, ensure you have spelled the name of the applicant correctly throughout the letter and refer to them using the correct gender pronoun.
4. Sign the letter, either by signing a printed copy and scanning, or adding an image of your signature to the letter.
5. Put the letter on your official practice/institution letterhead. If you do not have letterhead, be sure to include your current contact information.
6. Save the letter as a PDF file (file size cannot exceed 1 MB; dimensions 8.1 x 11 inches). File cannot be encrypted or password protected.
7. For uploading into ERAS, ensure that the student/applicant provides you with an ERAS-generated Letter Request Form, which will include a unique identifying number for your letter, as well as instructions for uploading.

For questions or assistance, please contact the UNTHSC Career Center at careercenter@unthsc.edu or (817) 735-5020. Our office serves as the UNTHSC/TCOM ERAS “Designated Dean’s Office” and can provide additional guidance regarding ERAS/LOR processes and policies.

SAMPLE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION – STRONG

Esteemed Residency Program
Well-Known University
1234 University Way
Big City, Florida 54321

March 19, 2019

Dear Program Director,

It is my distinct pleasure to write in support of the application of Ms. Jan Brady for your residency program. I have been an educator for three decades with considerable experience with national organizations. I worked closely with Ms. Brady during her third year clerkship as well as during her acting internship. As is evident from her CV, Ms. Brady has excelled throughout her career with many notable accomplishments which I will not repeat here. I will focus on my experiences with Ms. Brady, primarily those related to her clinical abilities and which demonstrate the qualities necessary for your residency: excellent knowledge, clinical skills, patient care, and leadership. I have observed Ms. Brady in both the inpatient and outpatient setting, taught her in class, and overseen her performance during her clerkship and acting internship.

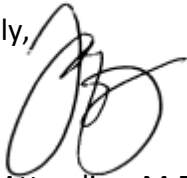
In addition to considerable intellect and exemplary performances on standardized examinations, Ms. Brady is a warm, engaging individual who teaches others by example, is inclusive, and consistently exhibits curiosity and motivation to learn. She comes prepared for all types of learning situations, having researched the relevant topics so that she can provide quality care as well as participate actively in class and clinical supervision. Ms. Brady is articulate, well-read, and able to utilize her knowledge effectively in the clinical setting. In addition to prioritizing her own learning, Ms. Brady considers the needs of others. On multiple occasions, she has arrived in clinic with handouts on relevant clinical topics tailored for the rest of the medical team. She has been described as one of the best students to rotate on our service by our residents and several attending physicians. A colleague was so impressed by Ms. Brady's knowledge and skills that she invited her to give a presentation during Grand Rounds.

Her presentation was outstanding – comprehensive in scope yet presented efficiently and effectively. On her own time, Ms. Brady designed a well-conceived, thorough study protocol on risk factors for readmission within 30 days to our inpatient service.

In conclusion, I am happy to give Ms. Brady my highest recommendation for your Internal Medicine residency program. In my experience, she is in the top 10% of all medical students with whom I have worked over the past 20 years. She will become an outstanding physician who will contribute immensely to the profession. I would be proud to call her a colleague.

If you have any additional questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Attending', written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Joseph Attending, M.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine

Note: This letter is strong for several reasons. It describes how and in what context the letter writer knows the student. It provides specific examples of the student's performance, including aspects that made her/him stand out in comparison to their peers. It also provides an estimate of how this student ranks among all students with whom the letter writer has interacted over the years.

SAMPLE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION – WEAK

Esteemed Residency Program
Well-Known University
1234 University Way
Big City, Florida 54321

July 28, 2018

Dear Program Director,

I agreed to write this letter of recommendation for John Jones, who was first introduced to me when he came to Butterworth Hospital as a fourth year student in 2018.

I found Mr. Jones to be a hard-working, conscientious individual. He took very good care of patients who were assigned to him, and he made sure that all the work-up was done before the morning rounds, where he actively participated. His responsibilities included: taking histories and physicals, writing SOAP notes, collecting lab reports from the previous day, writing transfer and discharge summaries and also participating in morning reports and noon conferences. He also gave some well-organized presentations. He has good clinical skills and displays them in a mature fashion.

John is a very humble individual who gets along well with others. He likes to read and exercise during his spare time and is a dedicated husband and father. It is therefore that I recommend him to you for any residency program that he may be seeking. I am sure he will be a valuable asset to your organization.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information.

Sincerely yours,

<No Signature>

Betsy Attending, M.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine

Note: This letter is weak for several reasons. It is vague and non-specific, describing what any medical student would do on a rotation. There are no specific examples of John's work provided. It appears the writer does not even know the student's specialty choice. It also provides too much information about his personal life. Overall, the letter is of little value in assessing student's application.