GUIDE TWO

Letters of Evaluation and the veCollect Letter System

Johns Hopkins University
Preface

The guidelines presented in this document provide important details for Johns Hopkins University undergraduates and alumni as they relate to the intention of applying to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO) and dental (DDS, DMD) school, all which utilize the Committee Letter process offered at Johns Hopkins. Details of the support provided for applicants to other health professions schools, including veterinary medicine, nursing, optometry and pharmacy are covered in individual guides available on the Pre-Professional Advising website:

https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/pre-medhealth/guides

Reference in this Guide to “Medical School” refers to applicants to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO) and dental (DDS, DMD) school.

Letters of Evaluation

Letters of evaluation are a critical element in the health professions application process. Schools value the perspectives of people who have observed your work and can speak to your abilities and personality. At Johns Hopkins, you are responsible for monitoring all aspects of requesting and collecting letters of evaluation through our online letters of evaluation system called veCollect (described later in this Guide).

Professionalism

It is critical that you are professional throughout this process, particularly in how you approach, provide information to, and express appreciation for the efforts of those faculty and others who are writing evaluations on your behalf. A note of appreciation is appropriate upon seeing in the veCollect system that an evaluator has submitted a evaluation on your behalf. Don’t forget to let evaluators know when you have decided upon a medical or dental school to attend.

About this Guide

Part I: Requesting Letters of Recommendation
Part II: What is veCollect?
Part III: Setting up your veCollect Account
Part IV: Utilizing veCollect as an Applicant
Part V: Frequently Asked Questions
Part VI: In Closing

We hope that you will utilize this Guide throughout the process of preparing for and applying to medical school!
Part I: Requesting Letters of Evaluation

How many letters of evaluation do I need and from whom?

First, in this document and in veCollect, individuals who write letters of evaluation are referred to as “evaluators.” Generally, you should aim to have four to six letters of evaluation. As a general rule, we recommend:

- two letters from science, engineering, or math faculty
- one letter from a faculty member outside of the sciences, preferably in the humanities or social sciences
- one to three letters from outside of the classroom, including a research PI, athletic coach, employer or supervisor, volunteer coordinator, etc.

We realize not everyone will be able to follow this exact model, so speak to your pre-med or pre-dental advisor about the compilation of your letters.

Keep in mind that a person who knows you well can write a more substantial and helpful letter than someone who hardly knows you. In choosing between a person who taught you in a small class versus someone with a famous name or title but who cannot write a personal letter, choose the former.

How should I ask for letters of evaluation?

Some evaluators may prefer you ask for a letter of evaluation via email, and some may prefer you ask in person. In general, you’ll need to use your judgment to determine the best approach.

To assist your evaluator in writing the letter of evaluation, we suggest you share the following materials:

- resume
- transcript (optional)
- graded papers that you have written for the instructor (if applicable)
- an application essay (if applicable)
- a typed cover letter to include:
  - why you want to be a physician/dentist/other
  - a suggestion of points you hope your writer might touch upon
  - skills, abilities, or knowledge that you want to share (be humble!)

Make sure that you allow the person the option of saying “no.” You want to have strong letters, so if a person is somewhat uncomfortable writing for you or doesn’t have enough time, it is likely that the result will be a short and weak letter. It is much better to have someone be honest with you at the start, so that you can find another evaluator who will be more enthusiastic. Determine this by asking the person if s/he feels comfortable writing a strong letter for you.

Give your evaluators plenty of advance notice and time to write a good letter of evaluation (minimum of a month or two). We suggest you ask evaluators to submit their letters of evaluation by mid-June of your application year.
Part II: What is veCollect?

Johns Hopkins applicants to medical and other health professions schools are supported by the submission of letters of evaluation from faculty, administrators, and others both inside and outside of the university through veCollect. veCollect is an online system that enables you to manage your letters of evaluation. In using this service, evaluators submit letters of evaluation (on letterhead with their signature) electronically to veCollect. The process for electronic submission of letters is through email attachment of the letter in .pdf, .doc, or .docx format. Students have to be in their junior year or beyond to set up a veCollect account.

What are the benefits of veCollect?

- Applicants list their evaluators and sign the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), to confirm whether they waive their right of access to read the letters written on their behalf.
- Applicants can track when letters have been received to veCollect.
- Letters are stored securely until needed, even if the applicant decides to delay his/her application.
- Evaluators save time by no longer having to mail paper copies of letters.
- Evaluators can submit letters electronically from anywhere in the world.
- The Pre-Professional Office securely downloads letters from veCollect for transmission to schools/programs as requested by applicants.

Who is eligible?

Students have to be in their junior year or beyond to set up a veCollect account. Only undergraduates and alumni who completed the majority of their undergraduate pre-medical coursework at Johns Hopkins are eligible for a Committee Letter and use of the veCollect letter service. All other Johns Hopkins affiliated students are advised to have their letters handled through the application service to which they are applying.

What is the cost?

The non-refundable fee for creating a veCollect account is $25, payable by cash or check; checks should be made payable to “Johns Hopkins University.”

If you received a fee waiver from the AAMC (or other application service), the fee for veCollect will be waived as well.
Part III: Setting Up Your veCollect Account

To register for veCollect, you must complete the veCollect Registration Form, which is available on the “Forms” page of the Pre-Prof. website: https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/groups/forms/

Once completed, your form and $25 non-refundable processing fee should be submitted or mailed to the Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising:

Pre-Professional Programs and Advising
Johns Hopkins University
300 Garland Hall
3400 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

After your form and check are received by the Pre-Professional Office, you will be emailed an authorization code in order to establish your veCollect account. You will proceed from there to follow instructions provided in this Guide.

How does veCollect work?

The veCollect process can be summarized in five steps:

1. Once you receive an account, you will enter the contact information for each of your evaluators, including their email addresses.
2. You will then click on the envelope icon and the system will send an automatic email to your evaluator, requesting your letter of evaluation. You should speak to your potential evaluators before clicking on the icon, to ensure they will write a letter for you and to inform them of a forthcoming veCollect email.
3. At this point, you will indicate whether you waive your right to see the letter (medical schools prefer confidential letters).
4. Your evaluators will upload an electronic PDF version of your letter, which the system will add to your account. When a letter has uploaded, you will see a PDF icon to let you know it is in your account. Please be patient with this process and allow up to three business days for your letters to be uploaded to your account.
5. Once all of your letters are uploaded into veCollect, you will group them in a “Quiver.” (More information about Quivers appears later in this Guide.)
Getting started with veCollect

To get started, go to: https://collect.virtualevals.net/login to login. This page appears:

Click here or here to create your account

Here are the steps to follow (see image of screen following the instructions):
1. Select “MD” in response to the question “In which state is your institution [meaning JHU] located?”
2. A **BLUE BOX** will indicate that Johns Hopkins requires an authorization code for registration. Enter your authorization code to create your account. **You will be provided the authorization code with your confirmation email.**
3. Complete the required (asterisk *) fields.
4. You will then follow through a series of prompts. **NOTE:** Don’t worry if you do not know any ID numbers (AAMC, AACOMAS, etc.) as you can update your account with these at a later time.
5. Once you have completed this form, click “Register for veCollect.”
6. After you register, **you will receive a confirmation email within 24-48 hours from the Pre-Prof. Office letting you know that your account has been activated.** You will then have full access to your account.
Once your account is activated, continue as follows:

How do I enter my evaluators and request a letter?

**Step 1: Create an Evaluator Record**

When you first log in to veCollect, you will see a screen with a navigation bar that includes the following:

You will click on “My Evaluators” to get started. Once you reach that screen, you will click on the “Create New Evaluator Record” link. Complete the screen and click “Create Evaluator Record.”

Add your username and password. You can choose to make it the same as your JHED or can make it something different.

You do not need to enter any of these numbers when you first register; they can be added later.
The next screen will confirm that you successfully created the evaluator record. You have the chance to review the information you have entered and to make any necessary changes. If you make changes, you can click the “Save Evaluator Record” at the bottom of the page.

**Step 2: Create a Letter Record**

You will now create a letter record for this evaluator. To do so, scroll towards the bottom of the page and click on the “Create New Letter Record” link.

**Step 3: Select Letter Type**

When you reach this screen, you will select the letter type. The dropdown menu looks like this:

“Any student applying to medical school (either M.D., D.O., or M.D./Ph.D.) will select the “Medical Schools” option.”
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You must also read the FERPA statement. You will see that the screen defaults to “I request a CONFIDENTIAL evaluation” because health professions schools prefer confidential letters of evaluation that applicants have not read.

To continue and create a letter record, “you must confirm your confidentiality preference by typing in your name to serve as a signature.” See screenshot below for more information. Then click “Create Letter Record.”

**FERPA Statement:** This describes your right to waive or not waive your ability to read your letters.

You must select one of these options. Remember that schools prefer confidential letters of recommendation.

You must type your name here to acknowledge your selection. Then, click “Create Letter Record.”

**Step 4: Request the Letter from the Evaluator**

On the next screen, you will see a message that says “Letter record was successfully created.” However, an email has not yet been sent to your evaluator.

To request a letter from the evaluator, click the envelope icon on the right, (it has a **BLUE** square around it) and an email will automatically be sent to your evaluator. See screenshot below for more information. Included in the email are letter writing instructions for your evaluators. See Appendix A for a copy of the letter writing instructions.

Once you have entered a Letter Record, you will return to the “My Evaluators” page.

When a letter has arrived, you will see a “PDF” icon next to the type of letter.
What if one of my evaluators chooses not to use veCollect?

If an evaluator is not comfortable using veCollect, they have two options (listed below). Regardless of which option they choose, it is necessary for you to create an Evaluator Record and a Letter Record for this evaluator despite the fact they are not using veCollect. Enter the evaluator as you would if he/she were using veCollect. You will then click the envelope icon to send the information to your evaluator, which includes your intention to waive or not waive your right of access, as well as the information they should provide in the letter of evaluation (suggested length of the letter, on department letterhead with actual signature, etc). They then can choose one of the following options:

1. Submit a paper copy of the letter of evaluation to the Pre-Professional Office, or;

2. Email the letter of evaluation to the Pre-Professional Office, where once received, Mrs. Krause or Mrs. Sanders will scan the document and upload the PDF directly to your veCollect account.
Here are directions for how to complete the Evaluator record if the writer is not using veCollect:

When a letter is uploaded, a PDF icon will appear. Make sure to send your evaluators a brief email or note to let them know the letter has been received and to thank them for their efforts on your behalf.

How will I know when letters have arrived?

When a letter is uploaded, a PDF icon will appear to the left of the type of letter (Medical Schools, Dental Schools, etc.).
Part IV: Utilizing VeCollect as an Applicant

Once all of your letters have arrived, your screen will look like this:

![VeCollect Screen](image)

How do I create, label and lock my “Quiver”?

1. When your individual letters of evaluation are submitted, proceed to the “My Quiver” section of the navigation bar and click the “Create New Quiver” link on the right hand navigation bar (just above the orange video link).
2. This will take you to the “My Quiver(s)” page and you will see the yellow folder on the screen (your quiver) that lists all of your individual evaluators. When all of your individual letters of evaluation are in, you will click the “Process My Letters” link on the top of the navigation bar.
3. You will need to review all of the evaluators in your quiver to ensure they are correct.
4. Before locking your quiver, you must certify that the information you entered into veCollect is truthful and accurate by entering your name into the space provided.
5. You are now ready to click the “Process and Lock this Quiver” button.
6. The labeling of quivers is very important. Quivers are to be labeled with the type of school and application year associated with that quiver. Labels should look like:
   - MD AY18
   - DO AY18
   - Dental AY18

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7. Click on the “Process My Letters” link on the top navigation bar...

... and proceed to lock your quiver.

Once you have created a quiver, you can click the link “Back to Quivers” to see a screen displaying the letters in that quiver.
This is an example of a quiver created for medical schools.

- If you are applying to MD and/or MD/PhD programs, please create one quiver.
- If you are applying to DO programs, please create a second quiver.

At this point, you are done, and the Pre-Professional Office will monitor your account to access your locked quiver.
Part V: Frequently Asked Questions

How can I delete a letter from my quiver, or delete the quiver completely?
If you have prematurely made your quiver and want to add or subtract an evaluator, or delete the quiver completely, (1) click on the “My Quiver” tab at the top of your veCollect page and (2) once you see the quiver, click on “Add/Remove letters” or “Delete this quiver,” depending on the action you wish to take.

What happens to my letters of rec if I delay my application or need to reapply?
Occasionally, applicants make the decision to delay prior to submitting their AMCAS/AACOMAS/or AADSAS application. If you decide to delay or if you need to reapply, your letters will remain in the veCollect system and you will be able to use them and add to them in a future application cycle. Please keep your login information for your veCollect account so that you can use it when you decide to apply or reapply.

What should I do if I’m having trouble getting one of my evaluators to submit his/her letter?
Sometimes it is helpful to provide a “gentle reminder” to an evaluator who has not yet submitted a letter for you. There are some situations when one of us in the Pre-Prof. Office may be able to help. If you are missing one or more letters and face the decision of whether or not to create your quiver without the full complement of letters of evaluation, we will help you with this decision. Be sure to bring these issues to the attention of Mrs. Krause or Mrs. Sanders.

Do letters of evaluation need to be in veCollect prior to submitting my primary application?
No. Letters of evaluation do not need to be in veCollect prior to submitting your medical or dental school application(s). But letters do need to be in veCollect before the Pre-Professional Office can upload your Committee Letter to medical or dental schools.

What should I do if I would like an evaluator to update a letter of evaluation?
In this situation, the updated letter of evaluation will overwrite the existing letter. You do not create a “New Evaluator Record” for the recommender. You return to your “My Evaluators” page of your veCollect account where you will see on the right hand side of each evaluators name/email address, a small envelope icon. Simply click on this icon and the veCollect system will resend the link and necessary information to your evaluator for him/her to reload the updated letter of evaluation into your veCollect account.

Can I add letters of evaluation to veCollect and my locked quiver after my Committee Letter packet has been uploaded to medical schools?
No. The Pre-Professional Office only uploads your materials once to each application service. If you wish to have additional letters of evaluation sent to medical schools, you will need to have your evaluator(s) send them through the AMCAS Letter Writer Application. The AMCAS Instruction Manual has complete details (page 61).
What if I have an evaluator who has not receive the veCollect notification email?
This is primarily a result of applicants (1) creating an Evaluator Record but not a Letter Record or (2) forgetting to click the envelope icon. Please check with all of your evaluators to make sure they have received the email that is generated when you create an Evaluator Record and a Letter Record for each evaluator. We count on you to follow through with your evaluators to make sure they receive this email and understand how to use the veCollect system.

As a reapplicant, can I use the same letters from my previous application cycle? And should I use the same quiver?
Your letters of evaluation will stay in veCollect and can be reused from one application cycle to the next. However, we recommend you speak to an advisor about the compilation of letters if you’re reapplying, to determine if you should have letters updated and/or add new evaluators. All reapplicants need to establish a new quiver, labeled with the new application year.

Can I use veCollect to apply to post-bac programs?
In you are applying to master’s and/or post-bac programs, access to any of your letters of evaluation in your veCollect account depends upon your application status:

• If you are applying to post-bac/master’s programs to enhance your academic credentials after you have applied to medical or dental school and did not gain admission, the Pre-Professional Office can send your entire Committee Packet (Committee Letter + letters of evaluation) to post-bac/master’s programs. The instructions and form to forward your Committee Packet can be found on the Forms page of our website and is titled “Post-Bac/Master’s, with Committee Letter.” http://web.jhu.edu/prepro/forms.html

• If you are applying to post-bac/master’s programs to enhance your academic credentials before applying to medical school or dental (and therefore you do not yet have a Committee Letter) you must have your letters of evaluation sent independent of veCollect. We can only forward letters when a Committee Letter exists, which will be attached to the evaluation letters.
  o When an evaluator writes you a letter of evaluation, for this purpose, please encourage that writer to save the letter so that it can be edited and uploaded to veCollect at a later date for your medical school application. Instructions titled “Applicants to Post-Bac/Master’s, without Committee Letter” are available at http://web.jhu.edu/prepro/forms.html.

• For specific questions regarding the administrative handling of your post-bac/master’s letters of evaluations, please contact Mrs. Krause or Mrs. Sanders.

Letters of evaluation held in veCollect cannot be accessed in the case of applying to internships, fellowships, or jobs.
Part VI: In Closing

Navigating your way through academic requirements at Johns Hopkins is, in itself, a challenge that takes careful planning and great patience. If you are pursuing pre-medical or pre-dental requirements, the academic planning process requires precision, adaptability, and flexibility. Each student’s academic path is unique and the one you set for yourself should take into account your ability to handle multiple sciences, your emerging strengths as a student, and a timeline that is yours alone. Most of all, we encourage you to seek input from your advisors to make sense of your situation and to devise a plan that is appropriate for your emerging academic and professional goals.

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Appendix A

Instructions to Writers of Letters of Evaluation
for Johns Hopkins Applicants to Health Professions Schools using veCollect

Johns Hopkins applicants to medical and dent school are supported by the submission of letters of evaluation from faculty, administrators, and others both inside and outside of the University. The secure, reliable, and efficient web-based service that we ask you to utilize for the collection and storage of letters of evaluation is called veCollect. The individual letters of evaluation accompany the Committee Letter of Evaluation sent to medical and dental schools by the Pre-Professional Office.

What is important to cover in your letter?

Please make an assessment of this applicant as a student, a worker, etc., and as a future professional in the specific health career of intent. Health Professions Schools do not expect you to provide information about every characteristic of an applicant. However, the hope is that you will focus on the applicant’s competencies. Some of the personal competencies associated with successful medical students and future physicians are listed below:

- Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others
- Reliability and Dependability
- Resilience and Adaptability
- Capacity for Improvement
- Service Orientation
- Social Skills
- Cultural Competence
- Teamwork
- Oral Communication

Here are some guidelines for writing your letter:

1. Health professions schools require that your electronic letter be on letterhead with your signature, also bearing the date, your name, and title.
2. Briefly explain your relationship with the applicant: a) how long you have known the applicant, b) in what capacity you have interacted (e.g., faculty, supervisor, etc.).
3. Focus on the applicant rather than details about the lab, course, assignment, job or institution.
4. Focus on behaviors that you have observed directly when describing applicants’ suitability for health professions school. Consider describing: a) the situation or context of the behavior, b) the actual behavior(s) you observed, c) any consequences of that behavior.
5. If you make comparisons, be sure to provide context. Include information about: a) the comparison group (e.g., students in a class you taught, students in your department, co-workers, etc.) b) your rationale for the final comparison.
6. Provide an accurate assessment of the applicant’s suitability for health professions school.

In addition:

- In the letter, include the date, student’s name, and the salutation:
  For example, “Dear Committee on Medical School Admissions:”
- Do not refer to a specific medical school (e.g. “applicant to Johns Hopkins School of Medicine”). Refer to medical school generically (e.g., “applicant to medical school”).
- If at all possible, health professions schools prefer that your comments be kept to a single page.
What are the steps in submitting your letter through veCollect?

(1) The applicant is instructed to provide you with background materials (e.g., a resume, an unofficial transcript, perhaps an essay).
(2) You will receive an email from veCollect with specific instructions on how to transmit your letter.

Will the Applicant have access to my Letter of Evaluation?

As per the **Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)**, the veCollect service allows applicants to indicate whether or not they waive their right of access to read your letter.

When you receive your request to submit your letter of evaluation, you will see whether the applicant has waived his/her rights to read your letter.

What if I am unable to use veCollect?

If you are unable to utilize veCollect, we ask that you prepare a paper copy of your letter, signed and on letterhead, along with the “Evaluation Waiver Form” that will be provided to you by the applicant. Applicants will have the option on this form to waive or not waive their right to see your letter of evaluation. **Health professions schools prefer receiving letters where applicants waive their right of access.** Both you and the student must sign the Evaluation Waiver Form.

*NOTE: Health professions schools require that your electronic letter be on letterhead bearing the date, your name, title, and signature.* You can send your letter of evaluation as an email attachment to preprofessional@jhu.edu.

Thank you for your support of Johns Hopkins University students applying to medical and dental school.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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