GUIDE TWO

Letters of Evaluation and the veCollect Letter System

Johns Hopkins University

Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising
300 Garland Hall
http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/
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 Johns Hopkins Committee Letter Process. Details regarding other health professions schools, including veterinary medicine, nursing, optometry, and pharmacy, are covered on the Pre-Professional Advising website.

Reference in this Guide to “medical school” includes 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 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. Once veCollect reflects that an evaluation on your behalf has been submitted, you should send a note of appreciation to the writer. Don’t forget to let your 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 who should write my letters?

In this Guide, as well as in veCollect, individuals who write letters of evaluation are referred to as “evaluators.”

Generally, you should aim to secure four to six (4-6) letters of evaluation. As a general rule, we recommend:

- two (2) letters from science, engineering, or math faculty
- one (1) letter from a faculty member outside of the sciences, preferably in the humanities or social sciences
- one to three (1-3) letters reflecting experiences outside of the classroom, which could include a research PI, athletic coach, employer/supervisor, volunteer coordinator, etc.

Not everyone will be able to follow this exact model, so speak to your pre-professional advisor about the who you plan to ask to write on your behalf.

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 person who knows you well.

How should I ask for letters of evaluation?

Some evaluators may prefer you request 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
  - suggested 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.” Your goal is to obtain strong letters, so if a potential evaluator 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 whether their letter will be effective 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?

veCollect is an online system that manages letters of evaluation for applicants to medical and dental school. Evaluators submit letters of evaluation (on letterhead with their signature) electronically to veCollect. The system also allows applicants to track the status of their letter requests and to determine whether evaluators have submitted letters.

What are the benefits of veCollect?

• Applicants request letters from evaluators through veCollect. Applicants also electronically sign the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) waiver, to confirm whether they waive their right of access to read the letters written on their behalf. (All applicants are encouraged to waive their rights as medical schools place great value on confidential letters that applicants have not been permitted to review.)
• Applicants can track when letters have been submitted/received to veCollect.
• Letters are stored securely until needed, even if the applicant ultimately decides to delay his/her application.
• 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 to use veCollect?

Applicants may request a veCollect account as early as their junior year. The letters stored in veCollect may only be used for application to medical or dental school – you may not store letters intended for application to other graduate programs. Only undergraduates and alumni who are eligible for a Committee Letter may use the veCollect letter service. All other Johns Hopkins affiliated students are advised to direct their evaluators to submit letters directly to their target medical or dental programs via the appropriate centralized application service (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, TMDSAS).

What is the cost for veCollect?

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 centralized 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-Professional website: https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/groups/forms/

Once completed, your form and $20 non-refundable processing fee should be submitted in-person 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 the authorization code necessary to establish your veCollect account. You will follow the remainder of the instructions provided in this Guide.

How does veCollect work?

The veCollect process can be summarized in five steps:
1. Once you have created 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 that they will receive an email prompting them to upload their letter to veCollect.
3. You will indicate whether you waive your right to see the letter (medical schools prefer confidential letters).
4. Your evaluators will upload a PDF of your letter, which the system will add to your account. When a letter has been uploaded, a PDF icon will appear, which lets you know that the letter has been received. 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 compile them into a “Quiver.” (More information about Quivers appears later in this Guide.)
Getting started with veCollect

Visit https://collect.virtualevals.net/login to log in. This page appears:

![Login page screenshot]

Click here or here to create your account

Instructions (a screen shot is below):
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 receive an authorization code in your confirmation email.**
3. Complete the required (asterisk *) fields.
4. Follow the series of prompts.
   - NOTE: Don’t worry if you do not yet know your ID numbers (AAMC, AACOMAS, etc.) as you can update your account with these ID numbers at a later time.
5. Once you have completed the form, click “Register for veCollect.”
6. After you register, you will receive a confirmation email within 24-48 hours from the Pre-Professional Office letting you know that your account has been activated. You will then have full access to your account.
How do I enter information for my evaluators and request a letter from them?

Step 1: Create an Evaluator Record

When you first log in to veCollect, you will see a screen with a navigation bar that looks like this:

![Navigation Bar]

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

The next screen will confirm that you successfully created the evaluator record. You will have the chance to review the information you entered and to make any necessary changes. If you make changes, you can click the “Save Evaluator Record” at the bottom of the page.
Guide Two: Letters of Evaluation and the veCollect Letter System

**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.
You must also read the FERPA statement. You will see that the screen defaults to “I request a CONFIDENTIAL evaluation”. Medical and dental schools strongly prefer confidential letters of evaluation that applicants have not been permitted to review prior to submission.

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.) 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.)

Included in the email are letter writing instructions for your evaluators. See Appendix 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?

Regardless of whether your evaluator opts to utilize veCollect, it is necessary for you to create an Evaluator Record and a Letter Record for the evaluator. Enter the evaluator as you would if he/she were using veCollect. You will then click the envelope icon to send a request 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, format, etc.). If they choose not to utilize veCollect, they should email the letter of evaluation to the Pre-Professional Office (preprofessional@jhu.edu). Once received, our staff will scan the document and upload the PDF directly to your veCollect account.
Completing the Evaluator record when the evaluator is not using veCollect:

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.).
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 (this is 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. 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 EY19**
   - **DO EY19**
   - **Dental EY19**
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.

8. Go into your Blackboard Account, access and complete the “veCollect Locked Quiver Notification Form” (see appendix to this Guide) and submit it to Blackboard as a Word document or PDF. The Pre-Professional Office will automatically be notified that you have locked your 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 (separate from your MD quiver).

At this point, you have completed the veCollect/letter of evaluation process. The Pre-Professional Office will 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 evaluation if I delay my application or need to reapply?
Occasionally, applicants make the decision to delay prior to submitting their medical or dental school application. If you decide to delay or need to reapply, your letters will remain in veCollect and you will be able to use them (and also add letters) in a future application cycle. Please retain your login information for your veCollect account so that you can access your letters 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 “gently remind” an evaluator who has not yet submitted a letter for you. If your letter is extremely late, the Pre-Professional Office may be able to help by following-up with your evaluator on your behalf. 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 to medical or dental school?
No. Letters of evaluation do not need to be in veCollect prior to submitting your medical or dental school application(s). However, 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 evaluator’s name/email address, a small envelope icon. Simply click on this icon and the veCollect system will re-send the link and necessary information to your evaluator for him/her to upload the updated letter of evaluation to veCollect.

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 Applicant Guide has comprehensive instructions for utilizing the Letter Writer service (page 45).
What if an evaluator did not receive the veCollect 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-up 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 remain in veCollect and can be reused from one application cycle to the next. However, we recommend you speak to an advisor if you’re planning to reapply so that you can determine whether letters should be updated and/or whether to add new evaluators. All reapplicants should create a new quiver, labeled with the new application year.

Can I use veCollect to apply to postbac programs?
If 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](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 if a Committee Letter exists; the Committee Letter will be attached to the evaluation letters.
  - When an evaluator writes a letter of evaluation for postbac applications, please encourage that writer to save the letter so that it can be edited and uploaded to veCollect at a later date when you apply to medical school. Instructions titled “Applicants to Post-Bac/Master’s, without Committee Letter” are available at [http://web.jhu.edu/prepro/forms.html](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 are stored solely for the purpose of applying to medical and dental programs.**

These letters may **NOT** be used for other purposes (application to other graduate programs, internships, fellowships, jobs, etc.).
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. We encourage you to seek input from your advisors to make sense of your specific situation and to devise a plan that is appropriate for your academic and professional goals.

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Pre-Professional Programs & Advising

Writing a Medical/Dental School Letter of Evaluation Using veCollect

Johns Hopkins applicants to medical and dental school are supported by letters of evaluation from faculty, administrators, and other professionals from both inside and outside of the University. The letters of evaluation that you submit for each student will accompany their Committee Letter of Evaluation, which is prepared by the Johns Hopkins Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising.

What should you discuss in a letter of evaluation?

Please assess the 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 (See the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) website for a full list of the 15 Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students.

The Intrapersonal Competencies and Interpersonal Competencies are:

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<th>Intrapersonal Competencies</th>
<th>Interpersonal Competencies</th>
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<td>Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others</td>
<td>Service Orientation</td>
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<td>Reliability and Dependability</td>
<td>Social Skills</td>
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<td>Resilience and Adaptability</td>
<td>Cultural Competence</td>
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In addition to the competencies, we also recommend that you comment on the applicant’s leadership skills and overall professionalism.

Guidelines for writing your letter:
1. Health professions schools require that your electronic letter be on letterhead with your signature, also including 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 a 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”).

The applicant has been instructed to provide you with background materials (e.g., a resume, an unofficial transcript, perhaps an essay).

*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.

Applicants will have the option on this form to waive or not waive their right to review your letter of evaluation. When you receive your request to submit your evaluation, you will see whether the applicant has waived his/her rights to read your letter. The Office of Pre-Professional Programs encourages all applicants to waive their rights. Health professions schools prefer letters to which applicants have waived their right of access.

**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. Both you and the student must sign the Evaluation Waiver Form. You may send your evaluation and waiver form as email attachments to preprofessional@jhu.edu and our staff will ensure the documents are uploaded to veCollect.

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