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

This guide provides important details for Johns Hopkins University undergraduates and alumni who are in the process of applying to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO) and dental (DDS, DMD) school. 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 (also known as “letters of recommendation”) are a critical part of the health professions application process. Medical schools value the perspectives of people who have observed an applicant’s work and can speak to the applicant’s abilities and personality. At Johns Hopkins, you are responsible for requesting and collecting letters of evaluation, using the online system called veCollect (described later in this guide).

Professionalism

All applicants are expected to operate with professionalism throughout the medical school application process. For example, sending a note of appreciation to an evaluator is appropriate once a letter of evaluation has been submitted to veCollect. We also suggest notifying evaluators when you have decided upon a medical or dental school to attend.

Letters of evaluation stored in veCollect are to be used only for the purpose of applying to medical schools or post-bac programs. Letters in veCollect cannot be used for applications to internships, fellowships, jobs, or other graduate programs.

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We hope that you will reference this guide throughout the medical and dental school application process!
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 secure four to six letters of evaluation. As a general rule, we recommend:
- at least three letters from faculty who have taught you directly and know you well
- one to three (1-3) letters from outside of the classroom, such as a research PI, athletic coach, employer or supervisor, volunteer coordinator, etc.

Keep in mind that a person who knows you well will be able to write a more substantial and helpful letter than someone who hardly knows you. In choosing between someone who taught you in a small class versus someone with a famous name or title but who is unable to write a personal letter, choose the former.

How should I ask for letters of evaluation?

Some evaluators prefer you ask for a letter of evaluation in person. In other cases, email may be preferable or necessary. 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)
- An introductory email or cover letter could include:
  - why you want to be a physician/dentist/other health professional
  - skills, abilities, or knowledge that you want to share (be humble!)
  - consult with the Life Design Lab if you need cover letter assistance

Make sure you allow the evaluator the option of saying “no.” Your goal is to secure strong letters. 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. Ask any potential evaluators if they feel comfortable writing a strong letter for you. If they decline, that’s okay! It is much better to have someone be honest with you at the start, so that you can work to find another evaluator who will be more enthusiastic about your application.

Give your evaluators plenty of advanced notice so they have sufficient time to write a good letter of evaluation. We suggest you ask evaluators to submit their letters of evaluation to veCollect by mid-June of your application year.

What if my recommenders don’t know how to write letters?

The Association of American Medical Colleges has developed a comprehensive document titled “Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant” that we encourage you to share with all of your letter writers.
Part II: veCollect Overview

Johns Hopkins applicants to medical, dental, and other health professions schools are supported by letters of evaluation obtained from faculty, administrators, and other professionals from both inside and outside of the university. These letters are stored in veCollect, an online system that enables applicants to manage letters of evaluation. In using this service, evaluators submit letters of evaluation (on department letterhead, with their signature) electronically to veCollect. Hopkins students may begin to store letters in veCollect at the start of their junior year.

What are the benefits of veCollect?

- Applicants can track when letters have been uploaded to veCollect.
- Letters are stored for four years post-graduation in keeping with our Alumni Policy.
- Evaluators save time by submitting letters electronically from anywhere in the world.
- The Pre-Professional Office securely downloads letters from veCollect for transmission to medical schools as requested by applicants.

Who is eligible?

Johns Hopkins students who are in their junior year or beyond are able to create a veCollect account. Only current undergraduates and alumni of undergraduate programs who are eligible for a Committee Letter are able to utilize the veCollect letter service. All other Johns Hopkins affiliated students are prohibited from using veCollect and are instead advised to utilize the letter of evaluation modules of the centralized application service(s) (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS) to which they are applying.
Part III: Setting Up Your veCollect Account

To register for veCollect, you must complete the veCollect Registration Form, available on the “Forms” page of the Pre-Professional Advising website. Once completed, please submit your form to preprofessional@jhu.edu.

The one-time, non-refundable fee for creating a veCollect account is $25.00, payable online. You can find the online payment site at https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/make-a-payment/. If you received a fee waiver from the AAMC (or other centralized application service), the fee for veCollect will be waived as well. A copy of the waiver should be sent to preprofessional@jhu.edu along with the veCollect form.

Both the form and fee must be received by Pre-Professional Advising in order to set up your veCollect account. See below for detailed instructions.

Getting started with veCollect

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

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 in a confirmation email from Pre-Professional Advising.)
3. Complete the required (asterisk *) fields.
4. You will then follow a series of prompts. NOTE: Don’t worry if you do not know any ID numbers (AAMC, ACOMAS, etc.) as you can update your account with this information 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 48 hours from veCollect that your account is activated. You will then have full access to your veCollect account.
*ONCE YOUR ACCOUNT IS ACTIVATED*

How do I enter my evaluator information 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.” NOTE: when creating a record, please add your evaluator’s business/work address, not home address.

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 must 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.
Guide Two: Letters of Evaluation and the veCollect Letter System

**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 (MD, DO, MD-PhD) will select the “Medical Schools” option. Dental applicants will select the “Dental Schools” option.

You must also read the FERPA statement. You will see that the screen defaults to “I request a CONFIDENTIAL evaluation” because medical schools prefer confidential letters of evaluation that applicants have been able to read. We strongly encourage you to request a confidential evaluation.

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 access to your letters. **We encourage you to waive.**

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

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. Please feel free to share the AAMC’s [letter writing guidelines](#) with your recommenders.

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.

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**What if one of my evaluators chooses not to use veCollect?**

If an evaluator is not comfortable using veCollect, the Pre-Professional Advising staff will assist you with the necessary steps needed to add your recommender. Please contact Mrs. Krause (ckrause@jhu.edu) if your last name starts with A-L, or Mrs. Sanders (ladytee@jhu.edu) if your last name starts with M-Z.
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.

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.
Part IV: Utilizing veCollect as an Applicant

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

![Screen shot of veCollect interface]

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

1. When your individual letters of evaluation have all been submitted, proceed to the “My Quiver” section of the navigation bar and click the “Create New Quiver” link (just above the orange video link).
2. On the “My Quiver(s)” page, 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. 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. 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.

For example:
- MD EY21
- DO EY21
- Dental EY21

If you are applying to MD and/or MD-PhD programs, please create one quiver (for example, MD EY21).

If you are applying to DO programs, please create a second quiver (for example, DO EY21).
7. Click on the “Process My Letters” link on the top navigation bar...

... and proceed to **lock your quiver**.

8. Once you have created a quiver, you can click the link “Back to Quivers” to see a screen displaying the letters in that quiver.

**IMPORTANT:**

- **Once your quiver is labeled and locked, you will complete the “veCollect Locked Quiver Notification Form.”** (The veCollect Locked Quiver Form will be available when you apply to medical/dental school, but a sample is on the last page of this guide for your review.)
- **Please upload your veCollect Locked Quiver Form to the application cycle’s Blackboard site.**
- **Once a quiver is locked, you will not be able to make changes to it.**
This is an example of a quiver created for medical schools.

At this point, you are done.

Remember: you must upload your veCollect Locked Quiver Form to the specified Blackboard site by mid-June of your application year.

The form will be available when you apply to medical/dental school, but a sample is on the last page of this guide for your review.
Part V: Frequently Asked Questions

How can I delete a letter from my quiver, or delete the quiver completely?
If you have prematurely locked 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 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/or add to them in a future application cycle. Please retain your login information for your veCollect account so that you can access it when you do 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. In some cases, the Pre-Professional staff may be able to help follow-up on your behalf. If you are missing one or more letters and are faced with the decision of whether to create your quiver without all of your expected 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). Do NOT wait for all of your letters of evaluation to be in veCollect to submit your primary application. That said, 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 the “My Evaluators” page of your veCollect account where you will see a small envelope icon on the right side of each evaluator’s name/email address. Simply click on this icon and the veCollect system will resend the link and necessary information to your evaluator so they can upload the updated letter of evaluation into 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 sent to medical schools, you will need to instruct your evaluator(s) to send the letters through the AMCAS Letter Service. Please see the AMCAS Applicant Guide for complete details.

What if an evaluator has not received 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 up with your evaluators to ensure they receive the email request 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?

Reapplicants must be aware of our Alumni Policy. If you reapply within the timeline outlined in our Alumni Policy, you can use the same letters from a previous application cycle. We recommend you speak to an advisor about your letters if you’re reapplying, to determine whether you should request updated letters and/or add new evaluators, and to determine if you are still eligible for a Committee Letter. Also note that all reapplicants are required to create a new quiver, labeled with the new application year (MD EY21, DO EY21, etc.).

Can I use veCollect to apply to post-bac programs?

- If you are applying to post-bac/special master’s programs to enhance your academic credentials after you have unsuccessfully applied to medical or dental school, the Pre-Professional Office can send your entire Committee Packet (Committee Letter + letters of evaluation) to the post-bac/master’s programs of your choice. The instructions and form required to forward your Committee Packet can be found on the Forms page of our website.

- If you are applying to post-bac/special master’s programs to enhance your academic credentials before applying to medical or dental school (and therefore you do not yet have a Committee Letter), the Pre-Professional Office will forward the letters you have stored in veCollect to the post-bac programs of your choice. Please follow the instructions and complete the form found on the Forms page of our website.

Can I use veCollect to apply to medical programs that do not use a centralized application system?

If you are applying to programs that do not use centralized application services (AMCAS/AACOMAS/TMDSAS/AADSAS) and want to use letters of evaluation that are stored in veCollect, the Pre-Professional Office can forward those letters to the programs of your choosing. Please follow the instructions and complete the form found on the Forms page of our website.

Once I have matriculated to medical school, can I request that my letters of evaluation in veCollect be forwarded to another medical school in an attempt to transfer institutions?

When an alum of our institution matriculates to a medical program, their file is not retained. Therefore, matriculants will no longer have access to letters of evaluation stored in veCollect.

For additional questions regarding the administrative handling of your letters of evaluations, please contact prepprofessional@jhu.edu.

**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.
veCollect Locked Quiver Notification Form--SAMPLE

Once your individual letters of evaluation have been submitted, a PDF icon will appear next to the evaluator’s name. When all of your letters are received, you will need to create and lock your quiver. (Please refer to previous pages in this guide for complete information.)

Once your quiver is locked, complete this form and upload it to Blackboard as a Word document or PDF.

The Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising will not be able to forward your letters of evaluation and Committee Letter to medical/dental schools until you have completed this form and uploaded it to Blackboard.

I confirm that my quiver is locked and ready to be sent to medical/dental schools.

Applicant Name: __________________________________________________________

Name of Quiver: (ex. MD EY21)______________________________________________