

# GUIDE TWO

## Letters of Recommendation

Johns Hopkins University  
Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising



Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising  
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## Part I: Requesting Letters of Recommendation (LoR)

Letters of recommendation (also known as “letters of evaluation”) are a critical part of the health professions application process. Medical, dental, and other health professions schools value the perspectives of people who have observed an applicant’s work and can enthusiastically write about an individual’s knowledge, skills, and abilities. Medical schools can vary in their requirements for letters of recommendation, however for most medical programs the committee letter (and its LoR requirements) supersede their individual letter of recommendation requirements. Applicants are always encouraged to review medical schools of interests’ specific requirements.

### How many letters of recommendation do I need, and from whom?

You will want letters of recommendation from people who know you well and can speak to your personal, professional, academic development, demonstrated skills, performance and/or character.

If you are applying to medical, dental, or other health professions program that utilize the Johns Hopkins University Committee Letter process, we require the following:

- **Academic letter (2 are required):** *\*academic letter is from an instructor who has taught you in a course and graded you A-F and does NOT include research for credit courses\**
  - 2 required Academic undergraduate letters from a Hopkins’ professor/instructor
    - one MUST be science (BCPM) or engineering
    - the second letter can be an additional science letter or non-science instructor letter
- **Non-Academic/Clinically relevant letter (1 required):**
  - 1 required letter from a medically-relevant experience—medical clinic, hospital, shadowing, or other clinically relevant volunteering or employment, not including research settings unless there was a clinical component with direct patient contact through evaluation/assessment or shadowing physicians
- **Optional (0-3) Additional letters**
  - Additional academic letters from instructors from other 2 or 4-year institutions and/or any postgraduate work (i.e., post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional training programs)
  - Additional optional letter— supervisors, PIs, coaches, mentors etc...

Note: Instead of receiving two letters from the same course or experience, letters can be co-signed to include multiple voices from one experience (ie. Two professors co-taught a course, two PIs in the same lab). It can be beneficial to think about what each of your letters might highlight you as an applicant and choose experiences that will showcase different aspects of who you are.

Learn more about the [eligibility requirements](#) a Committee Letter.

### How can I build rapport with faculty?

Although at first it might feel awkward or intimidating to strike up conversation with faculty, there are some great ways to build rapport:

- Be attentive in class
- Introduce yourself, say hello
- Participate in class



- Attend office hours whether its to discuss challenges in the class or excitement and general thoughts about course topics
- Ask to join their lab, or apply to be a TA

### How should I ask for letters of recommendation?

The way you approach asking for a letter of recommendation can depend on your relationship with your potential letter writer. Use your best judgment in considering the recommender, your relationship with the person, and the environment. For example, you may feel comfortable asking a PI or supervisor you see on a regular basis and with whom you work closely in-person during one of your daily interactions. However, you may feel more comfortable with sending a re-introductory email to a professor that taught you in a course you already completed.

If making the request via email, we suggest including the following in your message:

- explain your connection to this person (did you take a class with the professor, or did you do a summer internship with the PI?), and why you are asking him/her for a letter of rec
- clarify your motivation for why you are pursuing a career in medicine/dentistry/other health profession
- describe the skills or knowledge (i.e., competencies) that pertain to your work with the recommender, or improvements/challenges you overcame while working with your him/her
- share post-graduation plans, if you know them, especially if those plans connect to your work with the recommender.

If requested, you should be prepared to share supplemental materials with your recommenders to best prepare them for writing a letter on your behalf:

- updated resume
- unofficial transcript (optional)
- personal statement (very well-written draft or final copy)

**Give the recommender the option of saying “no.”** Your goal is to secure strong and supportive letters. A potential letter writer might not be able to provide the best letter if they are uncomfortable writing for you or do not have enough time to write. If they decline, that’s okay! Remember to be gracious even if you are told no. It is better to have someone speak honestly with you at the start, so that you can work to find another evaluator who will be more enthusiastic about your application.

**Give your recommender time to reply to your email.** Sometimes it’s not easy to reply to emails within 24 or 48 hours. Please give your recommenders at least one week to reply before resending your request.

**Give your recommenders advance notice so they have sufficient time (we recommend a minimum of 5 weeks’ notice) to write the letter.**

The Association of American Medical Colleges has developed [“Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant.”](#) We encourage you to share the link if your recommenders are unfamiliar with writing letters for medical/dental school applicants.

## Part II: How do I receive my letters of recommendation

For applicants in a current application cycle utilizing the committee letter, refer to the LoR guidelines provided to applicants.

The Office of Preprofessional Programs and Advising cannot store letters for future application cycles. It is best to maintain periodic contact with a letter writer you wish to write for you in a future application cycle.

### How does my Committee Letter factor into all of this?

The Office of Preprofessional Programs and Advising begins uploading Committee Letters in July (this is also when AMCAS medical schools can begin to view verified applications and begin sending secondaries).

For applicants in the current cycle utilizing the committee letter, please refer to the application guides provided to applicants for instruction on how to enter the committee letter contact information in your primary application. When all letters of recommendation have been received your committee letter will be moved be finalized and uploaded to your primary application(s).

## Part III: Frequently Asked Questions

### **When should I ask for letters of recommendation?**

You should build a potential list of letter writers in the fall prior to applying. Most students ask for letters in the spring semester (January to May). If you are taking a class in the spring and would like to receive a letter of rec from that professor, you should wait until later in the semester (late April) to make the request. Conversely, if you had a summer internship and know you will not be returning, you can ask for the letter earlier, in January. Thus, the timing of the ask might vary with each recommender.

### **What deadline should I give my recommenders for writing their letters**

If you are applying through the committee letter process, the deadline to submit letters of recommendation is near the end of July (check your application year's specific deadlines). Letters can be submitted earlier and we encourage applicants to submit earlier in July and not to wait until the July 30<sup>th</sup> deadline.

### **Do letters of recommendation need to be submitted before my primary application?**

No. DO NOT delay your primary application in an effort to simultaneously submit your letters of rec. You should submit your primary application (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, etc) within the month of June (early June is recommended for submission but it is best to take your time to ensure you have completed and thoroughly proofread your application). Your letters of recommendation and Committee Letter can only be uploaded after you have a primary application submitted.

### **What should I do if I am having trouble getting one of my recommenders to submit his/her letter?**

It is important to be communicative with your letter writers to ensure they are aware of the letter of recommendation deadline and the date you plan to submit your application. If you have concerns that you have not been able to reach your letter writer or that you will not receive a letter of recommendation by the deadline, you should reach out to [preprofessional@jhu.edu](mailto:preprofessional@jhu.edu) to discuss.



### **As a reapplicant, can I use the same letters from my previous application cycle?**

Reapplicants are encouraged to obtain at least one new letter that represents a job, school, or other activity from the bridge year(s). Here are other scenarios to consider:

- If a letter writer submitted in a previous year and you are still working with that person, please ask the writer to submit a new letter that includes updated tasks and responsibilities.
- If multiple letters of recommendation are one year old (written and dated the year before you're applying), you can use them as they are. *However*, if possible, re-applicants should consider updating the date on the top of the letter for LoRs dated more than a year before the application cycle.
- If the letters of recommendation are dated two or more years prior, we recommend you ask the letter writers to resubmit their letters with a new date at the top of the letter; they can also include any updates to their work with you, if applicable.

If reapplying, please speak with an advisor about your letters of recommendation to determine whether you should request updated letters and/or add new evaluators, and to determine if your eligibility for a Committee Letter.

## **Professionalism**

All applicants are expected to operate with professionalism throughout the medical school application process. This includes exercising patience while waiting for your letters to be written, contacting your writers if you are delaying your application, thanking your recommenders for their support, and notifying your recommenders when you have decided upon a medical or dental school to attend.

## **In Closing**

As you embark on your pre-med/pre-health path, it is important to reflect on why you want a career in medicine or dentistry, what your strengths are as an applicant, and what timeline you have set for applying. We encourage you to seek input from your advisors to devise a plan that is appropriate for your emerging academic and professional goals. For more information, please make an [advising appointment](#) or email [preprofessional@jhu.edu](mailto:preprofessional@jhu.edu).