

Securing Strong Letters of Recommendation for Medical School

WHO TO ASK AND HOW

Dean Joy Kiefer,
Prehealth Advisor, College of Arts and Sciences



WHO AM I? HOW DO I KNOW WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT?

- My experience as a Fellowship Advisor: If I can help someone win a Rhodes Scholarship, I can help you get to medical school.
- I have written many letters of recommendation.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!!

Importance of Application Data to Admissions Officers at 113 Medical Schools in Their Decisions to Invite Interviewees and Offer Acceptances
 Source: *Analysis in Brief*, Sept. 2011; Vol. 11 (6): AAMC

Invite Interviewees

GPA: Cumulative science and math (3.7)
 GPA: Cumulative (3.6)
 MCAT Total scores (3.5)
 Letters of recommendation (3.4)
 Community service: medical (3.3)
 Personal statements (3.2)
 Medical/clinical work experience (3.2)
 Community service: non-medical (3.1)
 Leadership experience (3.0)
 Completion of premedical requirements (3.0)
 Experience with underserved populations (2.7)

Offer Acceptances

Interview recommendation (4.5)
 Letters of recommendation (3.8)
 GPA: Cumulative science and math (3.7)
 Community service: medical (3.6)
 GPA: Cumulative (3.6)
 MCAT Total scores (3.4)
 Personal statements (3.4)
 Medical/clinical work experience (3.4)
 Community service: non-medical (3.3)
 Leadership experience (3.2)
 Completion of premedical requirements (3.1)
 Experience with underserved populations (3.0)

Color Scheme

Red = Academic data

Blue = Experiential data

Black = Combination of multiple types of data

Rating Scale

5 = Extremely Important
 4 = Very Important
 3 = Important
 2 = Somewhat Important
 1 = Not Important

Note: Mean importance ratings are shown in parenthesis. Application data are presented in descending order of importance to admissions committees' decisions about which applicants to interview and accept into medical school. The admissions data presented standard deviations ranging from 0.9 to 1.7, indicating variation in importance across medical schools. Data about the importance of "interview recommendations" were not collected at the "invitee interviewees" stage. See supplemental material for a complete list of application data rated, mean importance ratings, and standard deviations.



RESIST THESE TEMPTATIONS:

- Waiting to ask for recommendations until the last possible moment.
- Asking for a recommendation via email.
- Asking for a recommendation hurriedly after class.



YOU PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE!

- Take ownership and realize that you have more agency in securing a strong letter of recommendation than you think.



WHO TO ASK....

- Faculty who have taught you. You need 2 science letters.
- Others who have supervised your work, service, research, shadowing, etc.

WHO NOT TO ASK....

- Anyone who knows you well, but has **NOT supervised** your mastery of the skills needed to be a doctor.



Your mother, and all others!



HOW TO ASK...

1. Do your homework ahead of time!

- ✓ What did you do in the context of the classroom, lab or work environment?
- ✓ Find samples of your work.
- ✓ Write 1-2 paragraphs reflecting about your experience with the letter writer. What did you learn?
- ✓ Emphasize Qualities and Skills.



WHAT ARE THESE SKILLS AND QUALITIES?

- Integrity
- Reliability
- Service orientation
- Interpersonal skills
- Teamwork skills
- Showing the capacity for improvement
- Resilience and adaptability skills
- Oral communication skills
- Ability to work with diverse populations

The AAMC posted these defined skills and qualities as a guide for letter writers!

- See this website:

<https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/admissionsinitiative/letters/>



HOW TO ASK....

2. Ask in a way that makes them want to help you!

- ✓ No email requests.
- ✓ Email to schedule a face-to face appointment.
- ✓ Sample email text: *Dear Dr. X, I would like to schedule a meeting with you to talk about my post graduate plans to attend medical school. May I come to office hours or is there another way I can meet with you that is more convenient?*



HOW TO ASK....

- 3. Come to the meeting prepared with EVERYTHING the writer needs to produce a strong, detailed letter.**
 - ✓ See handout for the list of everything.
 - ✓ Use your reflection writing to bridge the awkwardness of the ask.



HOW TO ASK....

Sample ask: *“I would like to ask you to consider writing me a letter of recommendation for my medical school application.*

In order to help you with this decision, I have some written reflections about my experiences with you in the classroom (or other) and how they relate to my decision to be a doctor. Can you read it now, and then can we talk about it to clarify any questions you might have?”

RESULTS...

- If you get, “No, I can’t,” then graciously move on.
- More likely to get, “Yes, I would be happy to do this for you.”



FOLLOW-UP....

- Email a “thank you.”
- Attach an electronic version of your materials in case they misplace the paper copy.



THIS WILL WORK!!!

- Any Questions?