

GUIDE TWO

Letters of Recommendation

Johns Hopkins University
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. However, medical schools also vary in their requirements for letters of recommendation, so applicants are encouraged to read school websites to learn about any unusual or 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 provide substantial information and examples on why you are a good candidate for health professions school.

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)
- **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 clinical research settings unless there was 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: Generally speaking, it is not useful to have letters of recommendation from two faculty who taught the same class, or from two PIs in the same lab. Additional letters of recommendation that restate or reaffirm the first letter writer’s observations and comments tend to be redundant.

Special information for older alumni: If you are applying to medical or dental schools as an older alum who is ineligible for the Committee Letter, you will likely be required to submit faculty letters of recommendation, with at least one coming from a science professor. Therefore, it is imperative that you stay in touch with faculty after you graduate. Send them occasional emails with job updates, travel news, holiday greetings, etc. If you are an older alum, please read our [eligibility requirements](#) for obtaining 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:

- Sit in the front of the class

- Introduce yourself, say hello
- Participate in class
- Attend office hours to ask intelligent, thoughtful questions, and/or discuss challenges you're having with the class
- Ask to join their lab, or apply to be a TA for their class.

How should I ask for letters of recommendation?

Because there is no one single way in which to ask for a letter of recommendation, you will need to use your best judgment in considering the recommender, your relationship with the person, and the environment. For example, a PI or supervisor you see on a regular basis and with whom you work closely will likely warrant an in-person request. With faculty, however, you might need to send an email, because it is not recommended you ask for a letter of rec during office hours (when other students are around) or after class (when a professor might be rushed).

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.

We also suggest you share the following 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. If a person is uncomfortable writing for you or does not have enough time, it is likely that the result will be a short, late, or weak letter. 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 plenty of advance notice so they have sufficient time (i.e., a minimum of 4 weeks' notice) to write the letter. When applying to medical/dental schools, please ask your recommenders to complete their letters of recommendation by **mid-June** of your application year.

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 to save or store letters of recommendation

The only way to store your letters of recommendation before you apply would be to have your letter writers hold onto them. There is no storage service from our office for those not currently applying. You will begin asking your letter writers to upload their letters to our application service in the spring of when you apply.

How does my Committee Letter factor into all of this?

Committee Letters are written in the spring and summer by the Pre-Professional Advising Office and are uploaded to medical and dental schools beginning in July.

When applying, you will indicate in the primary application(s) that you are receiving a **Committee Letter** from Johns Hopkins University. In turn, Pre-Professional Advising will access your individual letters of recommendation through our application system, attach them to the end of your Committee Letter, and upload the entire packet (the Committee Letter + your individual letters of recommendation) as one PDF to the primary application service(s) of your choosing.

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 hope to get 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

Please ask your recommenders to submit their letters by mid-June of your application year.

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



No. In fact, do NOT delay your primary application in an effort to simultaneously submit your letters of rec. Submit your application as early as possible, even if your letters of recommendation and Committee Letter have not yet been submitted.

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

Sometimes it is helpful to provide a “gentle reminder” to a writer who has not yet submitted a letter by mid or late June of your application year. If it is getting late into the summer and the letter has not been written, you can try calling the office in which your recommender works and asking someone on staff to assist you in communicating with the writer.

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, we strongly encourage you to ask at least one or two 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 the letters of recommendation are more than one year old (two+ years), 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 you are still eligible 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.