

HEALTH PROFESSIONS OFFICE

REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are important. They are personal statements about you as well as about your work, so think carefully about whom you ask to write a letter. Think of those aspects of yourself that you wish presented and who might be able to do that best. Professional school admissions committees are interested in academic achievement, motivation, suitability for a medical career, and those traits that make you an interesting person.

We recommend that students have between three and six letters, with at least two coming from faculty members in the sciences and one from a faculty member in the non-sciences (note that professional schools consider psychology to be a non-science). Remember that at some point in the letter of recommendation most faculty evaluators state your rank in class, so try not to request letters from faculty who were not able to give you a very high grade. Letters can also be obtained from research supervisors, volunteer supervisors, and employers. But think about the position of the person supplying the letter (a supervisor in a fast-food restaurant would not be a good choice). Do not ask family friends unless you have had a direct working relationship with them.

Always request a letter of recommendation in person. Be sure to give the evaluator a LETTER OF EVALUATION FORM; a letter of recommendation cannot be included in your file unless this form accompanies it.

Remember that the best evaluation is about a page long. It is your obligation to give the person writing a letter of recommendation enough information about yourself so he/she can fill a page. (It only takes a few lines for an evaluator to state your name, the class you took, the grade, and that you seem to be a nice person.) It is a good idea to provide the evaluator with an autobiographical statement (instructions for preparing such a statement are available in the Health Professions Office), and your Personal Statement from your AMCAS application. Most people appreciate this kind of information and it generally improves your letter. It is also a good idea to give the evaluator a picture of yourself. Many faculty write many letters of evaluation and might need a picture when they sit down to write your letter in order to remind them who you are.

REMEMBER THAT:

- We will accept letters of recommendation only from the writer.
- The evaluations should augment your academic record.
- The letters are written exclusively for submission to admissions committees and cannot be used for any other purpose.
- Ask people who know you and your work best.

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, students have the right to read any evaluative material sent out about them. If you choose to have an open file, you may read your letters. However, we have found that many evaluators believe that their letters should be confidential, and will only write a letter if you agree to waive your rights and have a confidential file. Some evaluators will write letters for an open file but, because they believe that letters in an open file may not be considered as strongly by admissions committees as those in a confidential file, may not take the time to write a highly effective letter for an open file. We recommend that you have a confidential file.