

How to Write an Effective Letter of Reference

Thank you for your role in providing an outstanding third year educational experience for our first group of CU Branch medical students.

This is the time of year that students may ask you for a letter of recommendation to support their future residency application. As it may have been a while since you have written a letter of recommendation for a medical student, we are sending these tips/best practices. In addition, the Colorado Springs Branch Deans Erik Wallace and Chad Stickrath would be happy to preview your letter and provide feedback, if you think that would be helpful before submitting. Please feel free to email the draft of your letter to erik.wallace@ucdenver.edu and/or chad.stickrath@ucdenver.edu. Thanks for your ongoing support!

Tip 1: Clear content that is specific and personal

- **Clearly describe your relationship to the applicant.** Discuss how you know the applicant (e.g. supervisor, attending, etc) and your qualifications for assessing the applicant.
- **Clearly describe the rotation or extent of contact with the learner.** Give the duration, setting(s) of student participation, and student role and responsibilities. If you instead know the applicant from an academic or research setting, state how long you have known the applicant, and how well.
- **Use specific accolades.** E.g. in place of 'excellent student', be specific: 'This student is in the top 2% of learners I have encountered in 10 years'
- **Use specific examples.** In place of generic statements (e.g. 'strong intellect and analytical ability'), provide a detailed narrative description of student performance. Provide specific examples of teamwork, leadership, professionalism,

communication, and/or medical knowledge. Discuss strengths, as well as mild weaknesses.

- **Avoid content available elsewhere.** The learner is responsible for providing other documents that cover USMLE scores, a detailed summary of their performance during medical school (the MSPE or Dean's letter), performance on other rotations, and a CV. You are not responsible for summarizing or including these details in your letter.

Tip 2: Accurate Formatting

- **Use letterhead**, or, if your department has a **template**, use the template.
- **Address** the letter to "Dear Program Director"
- **Ensure the candidate's name is correctly spelled** & consistent throughout the letter. Include their **AAMC ID#** at least once in the letter.
- **Include a statement regarding preparation of letter:** Clarify the student request for the letter, and whether student has waived right to review letter.
- **Recommended length** is no more than **1-2 pages**
- Save the letter as a **PDF file**

Tip 3: Finish strong

Write a final paragraph that includes:

- **Your overall assessment** of how the student will perform as a resident and future member of that specialty
- **Add that you welcome requests for information.** Include your contact information if it is not already included on the letterhead.

Write your letter and upload directly to **ERAS** by Oct 1 to have the maximum availability for the residency selection process.

The applicant should provide you with a Letter Request Form, which will include a unique identifying number for your letter, as well as instructions for uploading.