

How to ask for letters of recommendation or LOEs.

I really wish that these letters were always called evaluations rather than recommendations [Letter of Evaluation or LOE]. When you ask a professor for a recommendation, you may incorrectly assume that if he/she agrees, she/he will recommend you. In fact we faculty recognize that letters of recommendation are really letters of evaluation and we can write an evaluation even if it is not a favorable recommendation for your selected program. I like to tell students to ask a professor using something like the following verbiage: “Dr. Smith do you feel comfortable writing me a positive or a strong letter of recommendation for medical (dental, nursing, etc) school?”

Before asking professors, talk over a potential list with the HPA Director. Then after talking with your selected writers, discuss again with the HPA Director. After you have decided on the final list, these names will be submitted on your Junior form and waiver.

Generally you will not get an A recommendation from a professor of a class where you earned a B. (Sometimes faculty may believe you to have gotten a lower grade than what you are capable of earning). If a faculty member says that they don't know that they could, they don't know you well enough, or don't have the time, you can always proceed with someone else. You should be grateful for any truth and guidance that such a hesitation might indicate. Schools say that they are most interested in a truthful letter from someone who knows you well, as they will have all grades in hand.

You will want to provide your evaluators with information that will allow him or her to address the areas under consideration (see sample recommendation form in [campus only docs](#)). This information may take the form of a CV, resume, oral conversation or annotated listing. Find out what your evaluator would like. Some may want an idea of why you want to enter the medical field. This may be your personal statement for your applications. If asked, do a quick personal statement for the professor on why you want to go to medical school, i.e. Do not wait until you have your application's required personal statement, which may be the last thing you do. You will want letters started much earlier.

Do not discount this conversation with your evaluators. They will best be able to write if they have more information about you than simply your shared class experience. Sometimes you will need to update the writer of what you have done since the class. This is especially true if you have not been staying in touch as is recommended.

You do not need to provide information beyond what you desire to give your evaluator. Generally faculty do not have access to your overall transcript

unless you are the faculty member's advisee or you provide the information. So, if you have A's and B's on your transcript and ask for a recommendation from a professor from a course where you earned an A, it may be your advantage to have the professor evaluate you based on only that course work, not your overall transcript. Some faculty may request an unofficial transcript or overall GPA anyway. Whether you want to provide it or whether the professor will write the letter without it will have to be determined. I have had students properly tell me that they are requesting that I write my recommendation based on the work that he/she did in my class and then they have only provided additional non-academic supplemental information. If you ask your academic advisor for a letter he/she will write the letter based on your overall academic performance.

However, in most cases if you are applying for professional school you want professors to address your wonderful overall record or to be able to explain an aberrant low grade or semester. In most cases the best letters will be the most thorough in addressing your academic record and this usually occurs by the recommender being thoroughly informed and knowing you well.

Sometimes a student had a wonderful complement on a single paper or academic event, or the complement comes from yet another faculty member beyond the three who he/she has already chosen to write her/his letters. You can ask the additional supporter if she/he would be willing to share the rave with one of your letter writers. Then ask your letter writer if she/he would feel comfortable incorporating that comment in her/his comment in the letter.

Be sure to give recommenders 4 weeks to do the recommendation early in the school year. Two weeks is a minimum amount of time that could be considered polite, but this will be hard for some faculty who have a large number of letters to write in front of yours or is involved in another project during the two weeks requested. In any case if letters have not been requested before May 15, the faculty really should have only two weeks to do the letter. We require letters by May for most students. If students put in a late request after May, we will solicit the letters but need them back within two weeks. Do not give your authors the impression that your time table for your application submission and or exam result reports is related to when we will want the letters. If your LOE writer and you decide (talk with HPA Director first) that a later date is acceptable be sure to communicate that to the HPA director.

Ask your LOE writers if they'd like a reminder from you. Be sure to give them any information that they require before we request the letters, which will be as soon as you submit your Junior form.

Write follow-up thank you notes. Be sure to tell LOE writers (and HPA Director) of your outcomes, especially if you are accepted to a program.