

Missouri Association of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons

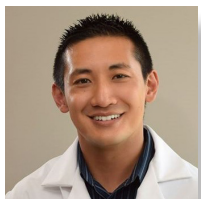
Guidelines for Writing Medical Student Letters of Recommendation

As a physician working with medical students, you will often be asked to write letters of recommendation. These letters can influence a medical student's career path, so taking them seriously is extremely important. Being asked to write a letter of recommendation should be considered an honor, not a burden. Here are some tips on writing letters of recommendation from respected physician leaders in Missouri.



Bruce Williams, DO, FACOFP
Associate Dean of Clinical
Education, Kansas City University
Kansas City

- Program directors are expecting students to be competent in the Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs). Also, include comments related to the clinical competencies (patient care, communication, professionalism, medical knowledge, systems-based practice, and practice-based learning and improvement).
- Reflecting on and attesting to the student's clinical skills is the best way to provide an effective letter of recommendation.



Chris Paynter, DO, FACOFP
Regional Dean of Medical
Education, Kansas City University
Jefferson City

- Create a special lean in the letter based on the specialty the student is applying for (e.g., teamwork abilities and being personable in family medicine; hardworking and determination for surgeries, etc.).
- Avoid using a template to help ensure each letter is unique. Letters come across best when spoken from the heart.



Katie Davenport-Kabonic, DO
Faculty, Cox Family Medicine
Residency
Springfield

- If the letter of recommendation request has come some time after the student's rotation, request to see their personal statement, CV, and/or have a brief conversation with them to refresh your memory and ensure recounting of shared experiences is supportive of their pursuits.
- Be mindful of gender bias in emphasizing medical students' qualities and characteristics. For example, women frequently are praised with "team player" qualities, whereas male colleagues receive "leadership" nods.



Jeff Davis, DO
Assistant Dean of Clinical
Education, A.T. Still University
Kirksville

- Don't write a letter of recommendation for a student if you can't write a supportive one. Respectfully decline.
- If you commit to writing a letter of recommendation, do it in a timely fashion. The student should provide you with at least two weeks' notice. Confirm the timeline with the student.



Other tips:

- Use letterhead.
- Address it to the correct person.
- Describe how you know the student.
- End with a clear summary statement.
- Include your contact information and an invitation to contact you if more information is desired.
- Sign the letter personally, scan it, and send it as a PDF. Include your titles, including faculty appointments, in your signature, and real signatures are preferred over electronic ones.
- Keep a copy of the letter in a special file.
- Consider the information you would like to read in a letter of recommendation and try to include it in the ones you write.
- Avoid clichés:
 - “Best student I’ve ever worked with...”
 - “You’d be losing out if you don’t accept this one...”
 - “This student is the best/great/awesome...”
- Confirm with the student that they are comfortable with not seeing the letter prior to you sending it. Generate a personal, honest letter.
- Utilize patient care experiences in the letter of recommendation to present the medical student with opportunities for elaboration during their interviews.
- Knowing what field(s) of GME the student is interested in can help determine the types of experiences to share.
- If the medical student has a few interests, keep the letter of recommendation vague and do not explicitly state that they will be an excellent resident in a particular GME.
- Don’t have your students write their own letter of recommendation that you sign!
- Letters should be succinct and no longer than two pages.
- Include accurate descriptions and specific examples while avoiding exaggeration and being overly vague.



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