Letters of Recommendation Workshop

Brandeis University Pre-Health Advising
Fall 2015
Why do you need letters of recommendation (LORs)?

Because they are required
- Letters from science faculty
- Research experiences (at some schools if you participated in research)
- Health Profession specific required

To highlight things you have experience with or that you feel are important about you
- Characteristics: Leadership, initiative, commitment to service, cultural competency
- Extracurricular or volunteer activities
- Clinical experience
- Work experience
- Other involvements that have been important to you
More is not always better

3. You need to have a **minimum** of three letters of recommendation

6. With (rare exception) you should have a **maximum** of six letters of recommendation

Remember, your committee letter will include a range of information about you. So go back to thinking about what aspects of yourself and/or your application that you wish to highlight. A letter of recommendation regarding a specific area/experience will inevitably draw attention to that area/experience in your application.
Academic Letters of Recommendation

**Science #1**
- A faculty member who taught you in a class.
- Biology, chemistry, physics, neurobiology/neuroscience, biochemistry, or other biological, chemical, or physical science based course.
- Math and/or computer science letters are accepted by most schools, but some will ask to see one in the BCP fields.
- It does not matter when you took the course as long as it was post high school.
- It can be from a class at another institution. Needs to be on letterhead and signed.

**Science #2/Research**
- All of the same components as Science Letter #1.
- Most schools will accept a letter from a Primary Investigator with whom you have done research in lieu of a professor who taught you in a class.
- Some schools will want letters of recommendation from any/all research experiences (summer or academic year) if you have research experience.

**Other Academic**
- If you have a non-science major and/or minor you should consider getting a LOR from a faculty member in that area.
- If you have a particular area of interest in which you have taken several classes, and you want to highlight it.
- If you have a strong connection with a faculty member in a non-science class.
- You are NOT required to have a third academic LOR from a non-science area if you do not feel that it would reflect positively on you.
Health Profession Specific Letters of Recommendation: Medical Schools

Some medical schools want letters of recommendation from people in the field. Even if a medical school or program does not, you may want to consider thinking about including one.

Osteopathic medicine

• **Requires** a letter from a Physician (MD or DO)
  • While MD is acceptable, you are recommended to reach out to a DO for a LOR to show your sincerity of interest in the field.
  • There are some schools that will require a letter from a DO before admission can be finalized.
  • You do not have to spend a significant amount of time with a DO in order to have a “DO Letter”.
We strongly recommend having a letter or recommendation from a practitioner if you are applying to any of the following health professions:

- Dental
- Pharmacy
- Physical Therapy
- Physician Assistant
- Optometry
- Veterinary

Some Health Profession Programs require letters of recommendation from people in the field. Even if a program does not, you may want to consider thinking about including one.

You are responsible for knowing if a particular school requires a LOR from a practitioner. You should always double check all requirements for the schools you apply to.
Other letters of recommendation can come from any aspect/experience you want to highlight. These are just a few examples.
Think about what you are involved in and your strengths and weaknesses.

- Academics/Research
- Extracurricular activities/leadership
- Work Experiences
- Clinical Experiences
- Volunteer Experiences
- Health Profession specific

Print this page, then take a moment to think about what you want to highlight in your application. Write down characteristics (think back to the first slide; this could be leadership, initiative, drive, personality, etc) around the outsides of the boxes. Then write down specific areas/experiences inside the boxes, even if more than 6. Think about which areas/experiences might highlight the characteristics that you have written down. Draw lines/arrows to connect them. Now, * the areas/experiences you believe you could ask someone for a LOR.
I’ve identified people, now what?
The Art of Asking for Letters of Recommendation
How do I start?

**Professor**
- Reach out
  - This can be by email or in person.
  - Let the person know you are planning to apply to medical school or a health professions program.
  - Ask if you can meet with them to talk about a letter of recommendation.
- Set up a time to talk in person.
- Ask if the professor can write you a “strong letter of recommendation.”
- Offer to provide:
  - Resume
  - Brief summary of why medical/health professions program.

**Supervisor: Work or Activity**
- Reach out (same as for faculty)
- Set up a time to talk in person or on the phone/skype.
- Ask if they can write you a “strong letter of recommendation” based on their experiences with you.
- Offer to provide:
  - Resume
  - Brief summary of why medical/health professions and how this experience relates or what you have learned that will be helpful in med school/HP program.

**Practitioner**
- Reach out (same as others)
- Ask to chat in person or by phone/skype
  - Know that you may need to send more information in writing.
- Ask if they can write you a “strong letter of recommendation” based on their experiences with you.
- Offer to provide:
  - Resume
  - Brief summary of why medical/health professions and what you have learned by interacting with this practitioner.
When to ask?

Committee Letter Deadlines
If you are asking for LORs for the Brandeis Committee Letter, you need to be aware of the deadlines:
• 1\textsuperscript{st} Priority Deadline: April 1\textsuperscript{st}
• 2\textsuperscript{nd} Priority Deadline: June 1\textsuperscript{st}
• Last Date: July 1\textsuperscript{st}

General Good Advice
• Give folks at least one month between asking date and when you want the LOR submitted
• For your Brandeis Committee letter, we recommend asking before winter break.
Other Good Advice

- Give recommenders a specific deadline.
  - Make it at least one week before you want it submitted.
  - Follow up with your recommenders about a week or two prior to that deadline.

- For the committee letter, fill out the Waiver Form for Recommenders (located on the Applicant Latte page).
  - Give it to the individuals you have asked to write a LOR.
  - Write the due date on the form.

- Provide recommenders with any requested/needed material as soon as you are able.
  - Have a resume ready to send immediately.

- Have backup recommenders in mind
  - Sometimes things happen and you aren’t able to get a LOR from a recommender.
  - Particularly for science recommendations, have a backup or two in mind that you can ask on short notice.
Using the first handout that you brainstormed on, I want you to think about those areas you highlighted for a LOR. Now, start identifying names of people you want to ask. Write them down. Write down how and when you plan to contact them. Set up a plan of attack! You do not need to identify 6 areas, but you do need to have at least 3.
Questions?

• Contact Pre-Health Advising at pha@brandeis.edu

• Make an appointment online or by calling Academic Services at 781-736-3470.

• Stop by Academic Services (Usdan 130) for Quick Questions Drop-In Appointments, Monday – Friday, 1:30-2:30pm.

• Find the Waiver Form for Recommenders on the Pre-Health Applicant Latte Page.
  • Scroll down and look under “special courses” at the bottom.