



HPAC Guidelines for Recommendation Letter Writers

We thank you for agreeing to write a letter of recommendation for an aspiring health professional. We wanted to give you some context and guidelines to help you make this task more manageable. If you have any questions please feel free to contact the Health Professions Advisors at prehealth@gwu.edu. Your letter of recommendation will be used for evaluation purposes by the GW Health Professions Advisor Committee (HPAC) **and** by health professional schools to which the student has applied.

HOW WILL YOUR LETTER BE USED?

Please address your letter to “Admissions Committee” and **NOT** to “HPAC.” **Compose your letter on official letterhead and include a signature.** We are familiar with cases of medical schools delaying review of an application due to lack of letterhead and signature. If you are a GW staff person and do not have access to GW letterhead, please contact us and we can provide it for you. Students are required to waive all their rights of access to your letter and it is confidential.

Please keep in mind that HPAC members read all of the letters that are submitted and that your letter will be included in a packet along with the committee evaluation. Reusing the same or very similar letters for different students makes the recommendation less valuable and makes it harder for the committee and health professions schools to discern how a student compares to his or her peers. Given this, **we kindly request that you avoid using form letters** whenever possible. If you are not able to write a unique letter for a student, please consider not writing a recommendation.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN YOUR LETTER

HPAC and medical schools rely heavily on information provided by the student’s letters of recommendation. We have found that the most useful letters heed the following guidelines.

- 1) Explain your relationship with the applicant
- 2) Assess the applicant’s suitability rather than advocate for the applicant
- 3) Focus on the applicant rather than details about the lab, course, assignment, job, or institution
- 4) Focus on behaviors that you have observed directly
- 5) Provide information on applicant’s personal characteristics, critical thinking and reasoning abilities
See the following pages for competencies desired by the AAMC
- 6) Provide information about grades **ONLY** when there is context for interpreting them.
Grades and GPA information are available within the application.
- 7) Provide comparative information (be sure to provide context and rationale for the final comparison)
- 8) Please double check your letter to ensure consistency with the student’s name and pronouns.

PLEASE DO NOT FORGET TO SIGN AND DATE YOUR LETTER.

WHERE YOU SHOULD SEND YOUR LETTER?

All letters should be addressed to **Admissions Committee** and should be sent via the **Privatefolio** dossier service. Students should generate a letter request through Privatefolio’s website that you will receive via email.

Thanks again for supporting one of our students, and please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS ADVISING

The Core Competencies

The 15 Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students, endorsed by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Group on Student Affairs (GSA) Committee on Admissions (COA), help communicate the standards expected of all applicants accepted to medical school.

PRE-PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES



SERVICE ORIENTATION

Demonstrates a desire to help others and sensitivity to others' needs and feelings; demonstrates a desire to alleviate others' distress; recognizes and acts on his/her responsibilities to society—locally, nationally, and globally.



SOCIAL SKILLS

Demonstrates an awareness of others' needs, goals, feelings, and the ways that social and behavioral cues affect peoples' interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; treats others with respect.



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Demonstrates knowledge of sociocultural factors that affect interactions and behaviors; shows an appreciation and respect for multiple dimensions of diversity; recognizes and acts on the obligation to inform one's own judgment; engages diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work; recognizes and appropriately addresses bias in oneself and others; interacts effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.



TEAMWORK

Works collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals; shares information and knowledge with others and provides feedback; puts team goals ahead of individual goals.



ORAL COMMUNICATION

Effectively conveys information to others by using spoken words and sentences; listens effectively; recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.



ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO SELF AND OTHERS

Behaves in an honest and ethical manner; cultivates personal and academic integrity; adheres to ethical principles and follows rules and procedures; resists peer pressure to engage in unethical behavior and encourages others to behave in honest and ethical ways; develops and demonstrates ethical and moral reasoning.



RELIABILITY AND DEPENDABILITY

Consistently fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; takes responsibility for personal actions and performance.

(CONTINUED)



RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY

Demonstrates tolerance of stressful or changing environments or situations and adapts effectively to them; is persistent, even under difficult situations; recovers from setbacks.



CAPACITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

Sets goals for continuous improvement and for learning new concepts and skills; engages in reflective practice for improvement; solicits and responds appropriately to feedback.

THINKING AND REASONING COMPETENCIES



CRITICAL THINKING

Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems.



QUANTITATIVE REASONING

Applies quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world.



SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

Applies knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems, and formulate research questions and hypotheses; is facile in the language of the sciences and uses it to participate in the discourse of science and explain how scientific knowledge is discovered and validated.



WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Effectively conveys information to others by using written words and sentences.

SCIENCE COMPETENCIES



LIVING SYSTEMS

Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems, including biomolecules, molecules, cells, and organs.



HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, sociocultural, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.

Content adapted from the "Anatomy of an Applicant: Competency Resources and Self-Assessment Guide for Medical School Applicants" PDF resource produced by the Association of American Medical Colleges, 2017.