Letters of Recommendation (LoR)

Please note: Letter writers are required to upload their letters straight into ERAS. Student Affairs does not have access to upload letters. Please be sure you are confirming that your letter writers know and understand this. If a letter is sent to Student Affairs, the sender will receive an auto-notification telling them they have to upload the letter to ERAS directly.

How far in advance do I need to ask for the letter and what does the writer need to write my letter?

Give the letter writer AT LEAST four weeks to write the letter. Advice: do NOT wait until last minute to ask your writers for a letter. They are busy, and need advance notice to complete the letters. It is recommended you give your letter writer a copy of your CV and personal statement (even in draft form) when you give them your waiver and instruction sheet.

Who do I need to get letters from?

Please consult our information sheet on Blackboard about specialties and expectations for LoRs (Blackboard>Student Resources>Career Planning>Specialties>Specialty Information for Residency Application). Expectations vary by specialty. Some fields request a letter from the chair of a department or their designee, other do not. It is important that you get a letter from a faculty member who has observed you clinically in the field to which you are applying. If you have performed research, it is recommended that your research mentor also writes you a letter.

Do not wait too long to ask an attending or clerkship director to write your letter. Ask at the end of your rotation or elective, while you are still fresh in their mind. It is recommended that you ask in person, and ask if they feel that they know you well enough to write you a strong letter of recommendation. That way, if they do not feel that they can write you a great letter, they can politely decline. Let the writer know that you will send your waiver and instructions for the letter once it becomes available.

How many letters do I need?

Most programs ask for three or four letters. Check with each program to see how many they accept, but usually the max is 4 through ERAS. Again, refer to the Specialty Information for Residency Application document for more information.

Do all of my letters need to come from the same department?

It depends on the department. Check in with a Specialty Advisor in the department about this question. For most specialties it is fine to have one of your letter writers be from another department. Utilize the resource below for more information on letters per specialty.

Blackboard>Student Resources>Career Planning>Specialties>Specialty Information for Residency Application

Is the letter writer’s rank important?

Assistant Professor or higher (Associate Professor or Professor) is fine. Residents and fellows are not. Clinical instructors are likely okay for most letters. The most important thing about a letter writer is that he or she knows you well and you feel confident they will provide you with an excellent recommendation. That being said, if you are choosing between two faculty members who know you equally well, choose the one with the higher rank.

Departmental Letters

As mentioned above, Departmental Letters tend to be based on aggregate data (like your clerkship evaluations). Sometimes they follow a standardized form or evaluation and are usually written by, or co-signed by the chair of the department. Again, not all specialties require these. Check in with your Specialty Advisor in the department about whether the field requires a Departmental Letter. If applying for a Preliminary position, for example for Medicine, you will need a Departmental Letter from Medicine.
- Medicine, Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Plastic Surgery, General Surgery, Neurology & Emergency Medicine are areas that typically send in Departmental Letters. The department will contact you early in the summer about the process, which usually involves setting up a meeting with the chair or the chair’s designee.
- You need to give the department your cover letter, requesting that they write you a LoR.
- Have your CV updated and a draft of a personal statement ready to help facilitate the writing of the letter.

Blackboard>Student Resources>Career Planning>Specialties>Specialty Information for Residency Application

What if I want to apply to more than one specialty?
You may need to get different letters for the different applications. You can also use the same letter for more than one field, but you may want to ask your letter writer not to mention the fields to which you are applying. This leaves less room for error on all parts, and makes less work for the letter writers.

When do my letters need to be in by?
The timeline you should give your writers is September 15, so that you can apply with all documents on September 15. If you are applying for early match, CAS or SF, your letters need to be in by Aug 15. Keep in mind, this is a soft deadline, and writers can still upload after September 15.

How do I know if my letter has been uploaded into ERAS?
You can check the Automated Document Tracking System in MyERAS to see what letters have been uploaded.

Can I use my categorical letters for my preliminary residency application?
You can either choose to ask for separate preliminary letters, or use your categorical letters for both. Programs realize you are going to move on after your preliminary year, and understand the use of letters for both.

Things to remember!
Don’t let your letter writers forget who you are! Keep in touch; remind them you need your letter written. Send thank you notes to those that have written you letters.

Who do I go to for questions about the LOR process?
Student Affairs (13-30) is your first point of contact about the Residency Application Process. You can ask anyone on the Student Affairs team: Jillian Aristegui, Dr. Peter Gliatto, Shashi Anand or your Faculty Advisor.