

Asking for a Letter of Recommendation (LoR)

Here are some tips on how to maximize your chances of securing quality LoRs.

Whom should I approach for my LoRs?

Approach physicians who are most familiar with your clinical abilities, medical knowledge, work ethic, interpersonal skills with patients and their families, and your ability to work as part of a team. Program directors may hold in high regard LoRs from clerkship directors, high-ranking medical school faculty members, and physicians in the specialty to which you are applying. Some programs may request that one of your LoRs be written by your medical school's department chair for the specialty to which you are applying.

If you have had experience in a U.S. clinical program, program directors may expect to see an LoR from someone in that program who can speak about your experience and describe how you performed in a U.S. clinical setting.

If you are submitting LoRs from a country other than the United States, ask your letter writers to evaluate your skills in a way that highlights your ability to succeed in U.S. residency training.

If possible, avoid submitting LoRs regarding experiences that took place more than two years before your application. Program directors want to see LoRs that reflect your most current knowledge and skills.

When should I request my LoRs?

You should request your LoRs as soon as possible after you have identified your letter writers. The sooner you request an LoR, the sooner the letter writer can begin to note the knowledge, abilities, and personal characteristics that make you a desirable candidate for residency. Allow letter writers plenty of time to reflect upon your performance so they are prepared to meet program deadlines for receiving LoRs.

If you are a medical school student, consider scheduling a meeting with the clerkship director at the start of your clinical rotations to discuss your intention to apply for residency in the United States. Ask the director if he or she would be willing to provide you with an LoR to support your application and inquire about performance standards that you would need to meet in order to receive a positive LoR. It is important, however, to not make a potential letter writer feel pressured; your goal is to secure a genuine and sincere recommendation.

What documents should I provide to the letter writer?

A copy of your curriculum vitae (CV) will help familiarize the letter writer with your background and past experiences. A copy of the personal statement you plan to submit with your residency application will provide your letter writer with insight into your passion for pursuing medical education in the United States, and your future goals.

What other information does my letter writer need?

Let the letter writer know which specialties you are considering for residency training and why, and ask for his/her perspective on providing specialty-specific LoRs. A specialty-specific LoR expresses to the program director that you are focused on pursuing a particular medical specialty. It should directly recommend you for training in that specialty and explain why you are well-suited for that specialty. If a letter writer has recommended you for a position in a specific specialty, it is not advisable to use that LoR to apply for positions in other specialties. If you are

submitting the LoR to more than one specialty, request a general letter applicable to all specialties, or request multiple, specialty-specific LoRs from that same letter writer.

Ensure that your letter writer has a clear understanding of the deadlines for submitting LoRs to your programs. It is best to have your application completed and your supporting documents available at the time program directors begin reviewing applications. A program director may choose not to view LoRs received after the program's deadline for accepting supporting documents.

Should I waive my rights to view my LoRs?

When you “waive your rights” to view an LoR, it means that you permanently give up your right to read the letter. Waiving your right to see your LoR sends a message to the program that the letter writer was free to speak openly, honestly, and without influence. It may also display confidence that you made a positive impression on the letter writer. The decision is ultimately up to you.

Is there a standard of etiquette that should be followed when requesting and submitting LoRs?

Program directors may contact LoR authors during the application screening process, so maintaining professional and polite relationships with your letter writers and their staffs is very important.

Consider writing a thank-you letter to your LoR authors. If a letter writer is taking longer than desired to submit your LoR, continue to remain professional and polite to everyone involved with processing your request.

How many LoRs should I submit?

You should submit a minimum of three LoRs in support of your MyERAS application. Although there is no limit to how many LoRs you may submit to ERAS Support Services, you can assign a maximum of four LoRs to each program.

To whom should my LoRs be addressed?

ERAS Support Services does not process LoRs addressed to specific programs or program directors. Your letter writer should begin the letter with a general salutation, such as “Dear Program Director,” or “To whom it may concern:”.