

How to Ask for a Strong Individual Letter of Recommendation

Plan to ask between 4-6 people for an individual letter of recommendation. You ultimately want to obtain at least 3-5.

1. Identify someone who knows you personally, can speak to the quality of your work and work ethic, and can address your fitness to be a medical student. (examples: clinicians, science faculty, a non-science faculty, supervisor, coach, employer, researcher). This should ideally be someone who you've had a previous conversation with about your career goals and academic interests.
2. Try to set up a face to face meeting. By setting up a face to face meeting you will be able to read the face and body language of the potential recommender.
3. Ask for a strong recommendation (here are some examples of how to ask for a strong recommendation provided by "The Medical School Admissions Guide.")
 - "Professor Peters, I have enjoyed your class and believe I have excelled in it. I plan to apply to medical school in the future and am hoping you can write me a very strong recommendation. Do you think this would be possible?"
 - "Coach Craig, as you know I am applying to medical school. I think a strong letter from you would help show I have been able to balance both academics and athletics at a high level. Could you write me a strong letter?"
 - "Dr. Dannenberg, I am hoping you will write me a recommendation to medical school detailing my work in your lab and discussing our upcoming publication. Do you think you can write me a strong letter?"

If you request a letter from someone and they are hesitate or unsure, say thank you and withdraw your request and ask someone else. The last thing you want is a cookie-cutter or lukewarm recommendation.

4. Provide information and paperwork for the recommender.
 - Updated resume
 - Unofficial transcript
 - Personal Statement
 - Recommendation deadline (may want to give them an earlier deadline to make sure it is submitted)
 - Some insight into how you are presenting yourself as a candidate (i.e. what is the impression you want the PAC or professional school admissions committees to have of you) in hope that their letter might complement this profile.
 - Detailed information about how to submit the letter.
 - Provide your letter writers with stamped pre-written postcards that say "I submitted your letter of recommendation today. – Dr. Peters" This way your recommender can easily let you know that it has been submitted.
5. Thanks and follow-up
 - Check in on the letter two weeks prior to the deadline you have given your recommender. Ask if there is anything else you can provide that might be helpful to their process.
 - Send a thank-you card on the deadline you gave the recommender.
 - Send a second thank-you note/card if you receive an interview or acceptance.

Information gained from Med School Confidential and The Medical School Admissions Guide.