

I’ve been asked to write a LOR, now what?

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Disclosures

I have no disclosures.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- **Describe** the essential elements of an effective residency letter of recommendation.
- **Document** clinical observations that support future letters and evaluations.
- **Translate** those observations into specific LOR paragraphs and meaningful evaluation comments that may inform the MSPE.
- **Use** a consistent letter structure while maintaining ownership of the assessment and final wording.

What do Program Directors say about LoRs?

From the 2026 NRMP Program Director Survey:

- LoRs are among the top 3 factors in interview selection
- 86% of PDs said LoRs influenced whom they interview
- PDs value:
  - Comparative statements
  - Specific examples of performance
  - Insight into character and work ethic 📣 "The best letters come from people who clearly know the applicant and describe their strengths in real-world clinical settings."

How are letters of recommendation used in residency applications?

1. Reviewed by nearly all programs for interview and rank decisions
2. Provide personalized insight into a student's:
    1. Clinical performance
    2. Work ethic and professionalism
    3. Communication and teamwork
    4. Unique traits or potential
3. Often carry more weight than grades or class rank in competitive programs
4. Used to differentiate students who may look similar on paper

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Essential Content – What a useful LOR includes

Your relationship with the student

- **Your role:** Identify yourself as the student's preceptor, supervisor, or mentor.
- **Setting and duration:** State where you worked together and for how long.
- **Frequency of contact:** Explain how closely and how often you interacted.
- **Basis of your assessment:** Identify what you directly observed, such as patient encounters, presentations, or team interactions.

The student's performance

- **Clinical abilities:** Describe relevant strengths in knowledge, reasoning, patient care, or procedural skills.
- **Professional behaviors:** Address communication, teamwork, reliability, or appropriate help-seeking.
- **Specific examples:** Explain what the student did and what that behavior demonstrated.
- **Response to feedback:** When relevant, describe how the student improved during the experience.

Choose the strengths you can support with firsthand observations.

Your assessment and recommendation

- **Residency potential:** Explain how the observed strengths support success in the intended specialty.
- **Performance context:** Describe the student's abilities relative to expectations for their level of training.
- **Comparison, when appropriate:** Identify the comparison group and support any ranking you include.
- **Clear endorsement:** State your recommendation in language that accurately reflects your assessment.

Your recommendation should follow logically from the evidence in the letter.

When you cannot write a strong letter

- **Respond promptly:** Give the student time to find another writer.
- **Be honest and respectful:** Explain if your experience is limited or you cannot provide the requested endorsement.
- **Be clear about your support:** Avoid agreeing to a strong letter when your assessment does not support one.
- **Offer another path:** When appropriate, suggest a preceptor who knows the student's work better.

Suggested wording:

"Thank you for asking. I don't feel I can provide the strong recommendation you need. I want to let you know early so you have time to approach another writer."

The letter should reflect your assessment

- **Ask for background materials:** A CV, personal statement, and reminders of shared clinical experiences can help you prepare.
- **Write from your observations:** You provide the evaluation, interpretation, and recommendation.
- **Avoid asking the student to write their own letter:** The letter should represent your independent assessment.

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Preparing Before the Request

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Preparing before the request

- **Observe intentionally:** Look for examples of clinical reasoning, communication, professionalism, and teamwork.
- **Record details promptly:** Capture meaningful moments during the rotation while they are fresh.
- **Follow up after feedback:** Note whether the student applies suggestions and improves.
- **Use a consistent approach:** Keep brief notes for each learner in a school-approved secure location.

What should you write down?

- **Context:** What was the setting or task?
- **Behavior:** What did the student actually say or do?
- **Supervision:** How much guidance or prompting did the student need?
- **Follow-up:** What feedback did you give, and what changed afterward?

A few specific sentences are more useful than a list of adjectives.

Example: A note worth keeping

- **Context:** Alex presented patients during an outpatient rotation.
- **Observation:** Early presentations included extensive detail without clearly prioritizing active problems.
- **Feedback:** Begin with a concise assessment and focus on the key clinical issues.
- **Follow-up:** Alex used the revised structure in three subsequent presentations.
- **What this supports:** Alex applied feedback to improve organization and clinical communication.

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Using Your Observations

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Turning an observation into a LOR paragraph

- **Identify the strength:** What does the observation demonstrate?
- **Describe the evidence:** Explain what the student did.
- **Interpret the performance:** Tell the reader why the example matters.

Example:

"Alex demonstrated responsiveness to feedback during our outpatient rotation. After we discussed presentation structure, Alex prioritized active problems in three subsequent presentations. This improvement showed an ability to apply feedback to clinical communication."

Using the same observation in a rotation evaluation

- **Describe performance:** Focus on the skills observed during the rotation.
- **Include growth:** Explain how the student responded to feedback.
- **Support your ratings:** Keep the narrative consistent with the evaluation.

Example:

"Alex improved the organization of oral presentations after feedback, prioritizing active problems in three subsequent presentations."

These comments will also contribute to the MSPE.

The same evidence serves different purposes

- **Rotation evaluation:** How did the student perform during this experience?
- **MSPE:** How does the school summarize the student's academic performance and development?
- **LOR:** What does your experience with the student tell you about their potential for residency?

Specific observations support each document. The purpose determines how you use them.

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Building the letter

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A reusable structure for a narrative LOR

- **Opening:** Introduce the applicant and explain your relationship.
- **Evidence:** Describe relevant strengths using specific observations.
- **Assessment:** Explain what those strengths suggest about residency potential.
- **Closing:** State your recommendation and provide your contact information.
- Use the same structure for efficiency. Personalize the evidence and assessment for each student.

What you can reuse—and what you must personalize

- **Reusable elements:**
- Your professional introduction
- The order of the letter's sections
- Letterhead, signature, and contact information
- **Individualized content:**
- Your relationship and experience with the student
- Observed strengths and specific examples
- Your assessment and strength of recommendation

Before you sign the letter

- **Accuracy:** Can you support every statement?
- **Consistency:** Does the recommendation match the evidence?
- **Fairness:** Have you described performance using clear, comparable standards?
- **Personalization:** Does the letter clearly describe this student?
- You remain responsible for the assessment and final wording, even when using a template or writing assistance.

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Using AI to assist with letter writing

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How AI can support letter writing

- **Organize:** Turn your observation notes into a draft paragraph.
- **Clarify:** Improve grammar, flow, and readability.
- **Personalize:** Retain the specific examples that distinguish the student.
- **Preserve your judgment:** Decide what the performance demonstrates and how strongly you can recommend the applicant.

AI can help express your assessment. You remain the author.

Example: Using AI with your observation notes

Fictional observations:

- Alex's early presentations lacked clear priorities.
- You provided feedback on presentation structure.
- Alex applied that feedback in three later presentations.

Example prompt:

"Using only these observations, draft a short LOR paragraph about responsiveness to feedback. Do not add achievements, rankings, or a strength of recommendation. Flag any missing information."

Before using an AI-assisted draft

- **Protect information:** Use institutionally approved tools and follow local privacy policies.
- **Verify facts:** Remove invented details, unsupported comparisons, or exaggerated praise.
- **Check fairness:** Review for biased descriptions and inconsistent standards.
- **Make it yours:** Edit the wording so it reflects your observations, voice, and recommendation.

Read and approve every sentence before signing.

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Final prep and submission

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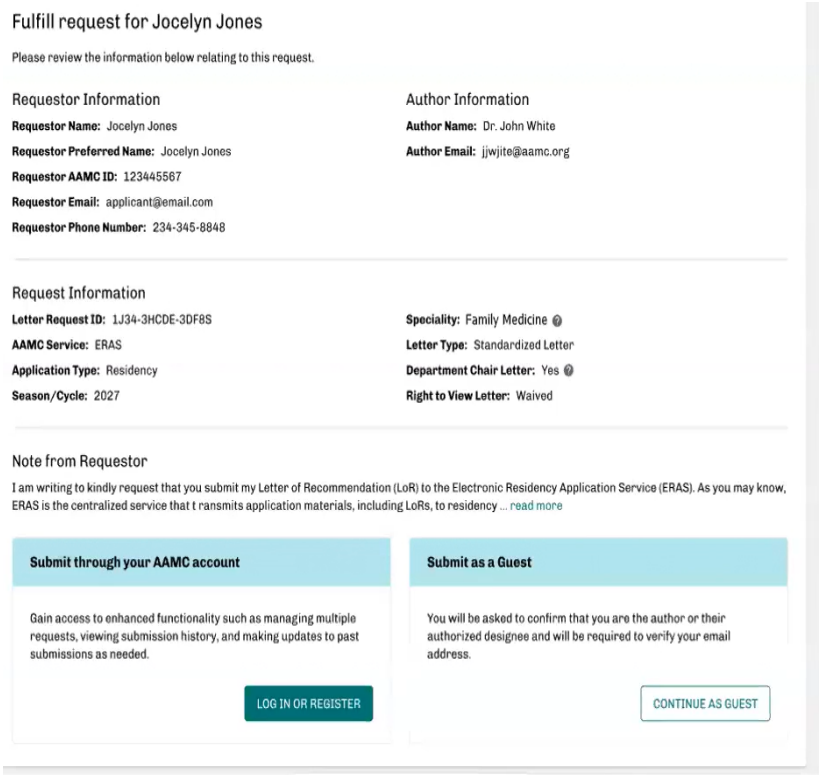
The final check before submission

- **Applicant details:** Confirm the name, pronouns, specialty, and rotation dates.
- **Content:** Make sure the examples support your assessment and recommendation.
- **Document:** Include letterhead, date, signature, and your contact information.
- **Requirements:** Verify the requested letter format, deadline, and submission system.

Check that you are submitting the correct letter for the correct student.

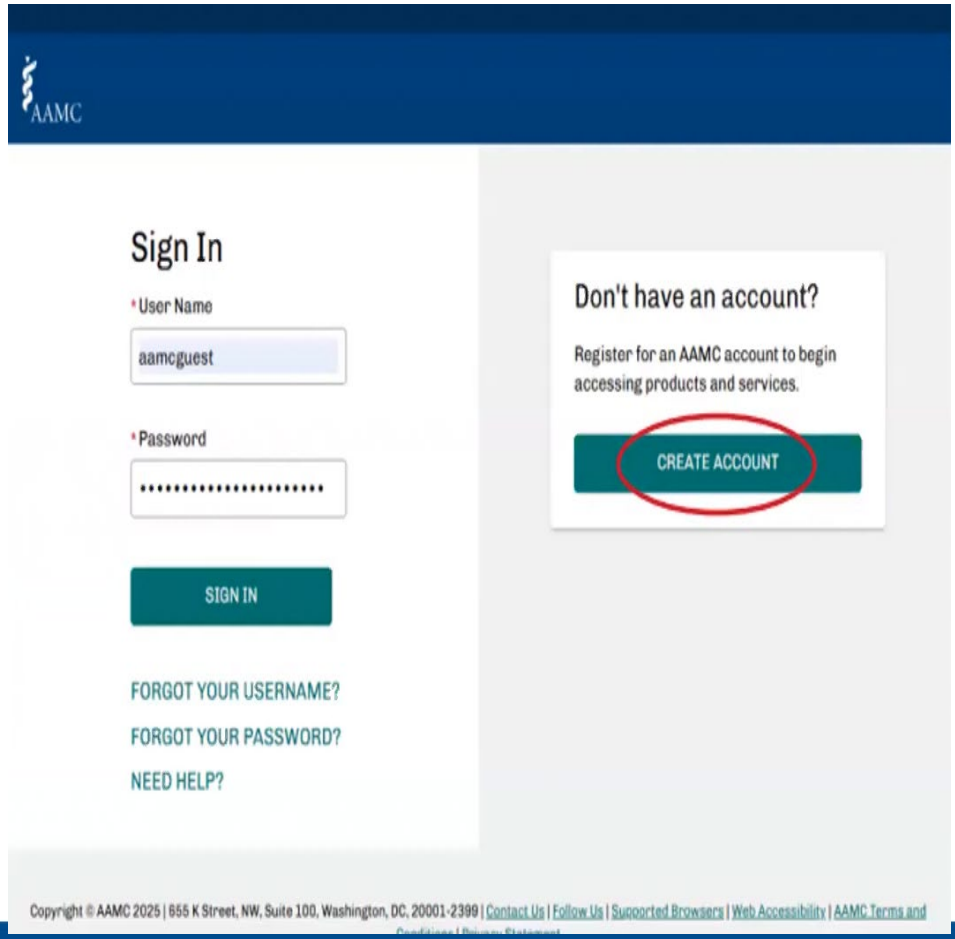
Submitting a letter for ERAS

- When an applicant requests a letter, it will generate an email to the address provided at the time of request.
- When you are ready to submit your letter, click on the link in the request email you received.
- That link will take you to a page where you have two options:
  - Submit your letter as a guest
  - Submit your letter using your AAMC Account



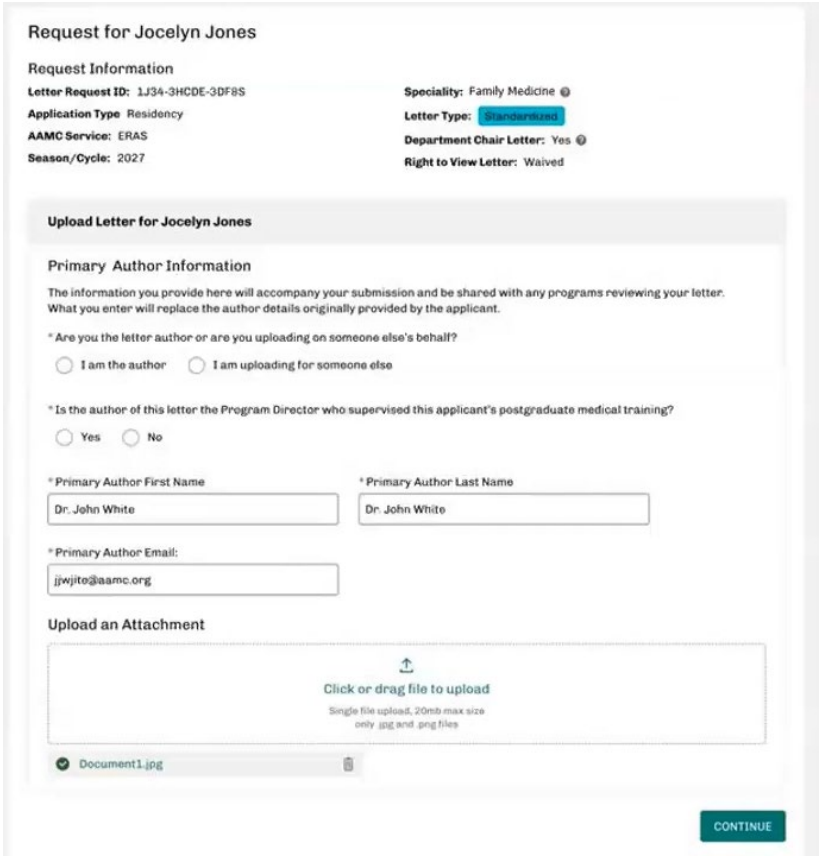
Letter Writer – AAMC Account

- If you already have an AAMC Account, you may proceed to sign in.
- If you do not already have an AAMC account, you can select Create Account and follow the prompts provided. You must verify your AAMC account email address to continue through the letter process using your AAMC Account.



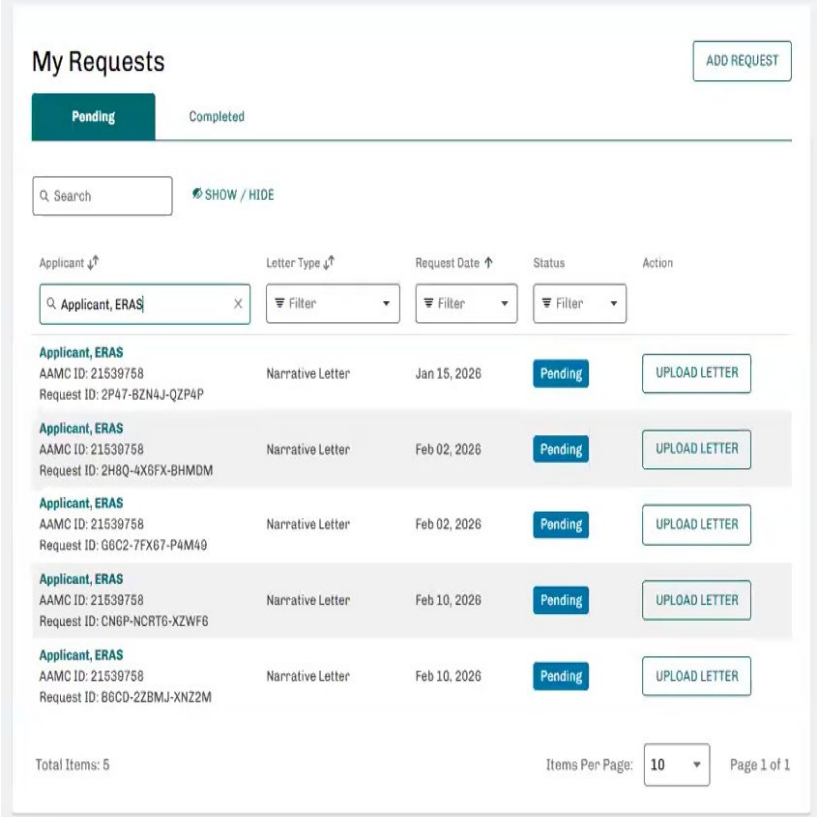
Letter Submission

- When submitting a letter for an applicant, authors will be shown the information provided by the applicant, and asked for the following additional information:
  - Whether you are the author or uploading on another person's behalf
  - If the letter writer is the program director who supervised the applicants postgraduate medical training
- After choosing Continue, letter writers will be able to upload their letter prior to confirming the upload.



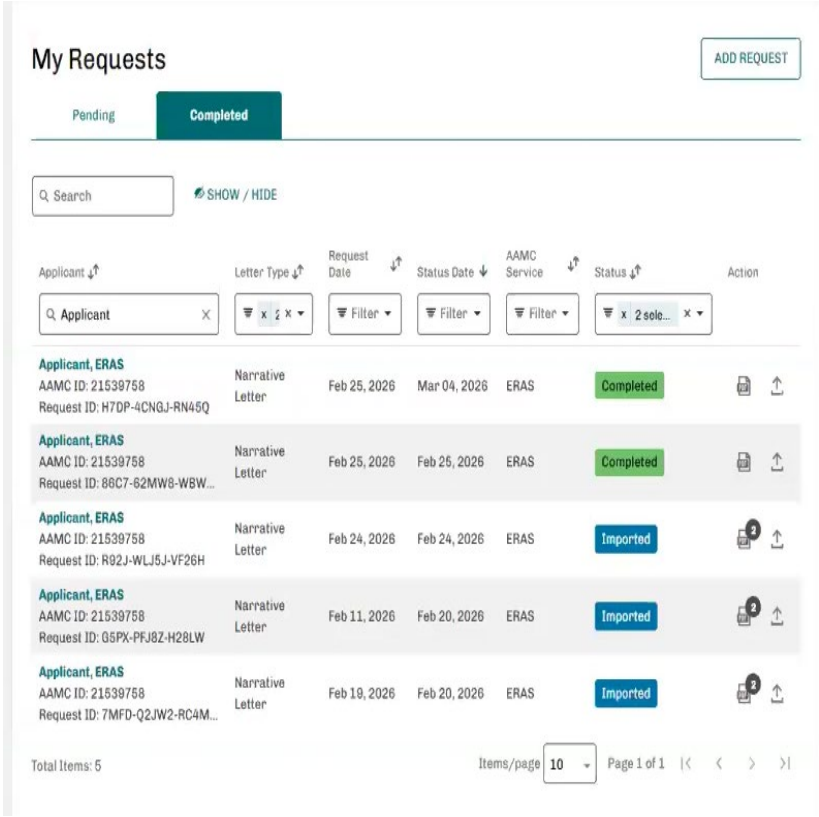
Dashboard Features – Pending Requests

- When using an AAMC account, the Letter Writer Portal will track all your uploads in one place.
- This tab will show all your Pending letter requests, and you can use this tab to manage requests that have yet to be fulfilled.
- From this page, you can also add a request with specific information provided by the applicant.



Dashboard Features – Completed Requests

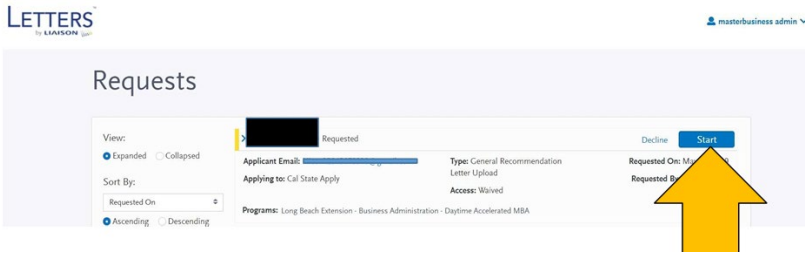
- The completed tab allows users to:
  - View request history
  - Search completed documents
  - Sort and filter by letter type, date and status
  - View pdf of past document submissions
- Users can manage what columns appear on their dashboard.

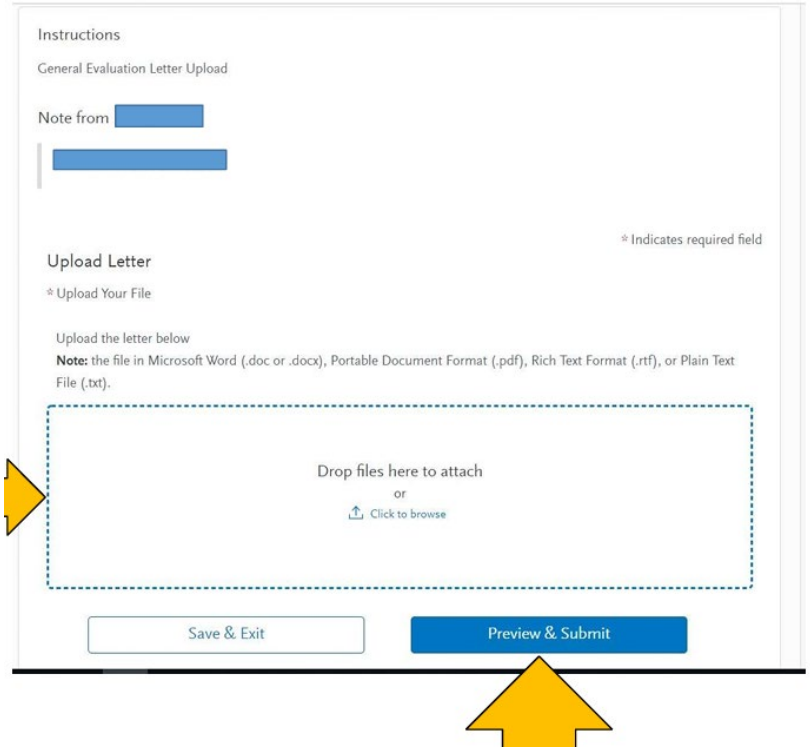


Submitting a letter through ResidencyCAS

Review the Request

- **Begin:** Select **Start** beside the applicant's name on the Requests page.
- **Confirm the request:** Review the applicant, request type, and requested completion date.
- **Check access:** The **Access** field indicates whether the applicant waived access to the recommendation.
- **Read the instructions:** Review the applicant's notes and any program-specific requirements before proceeding.

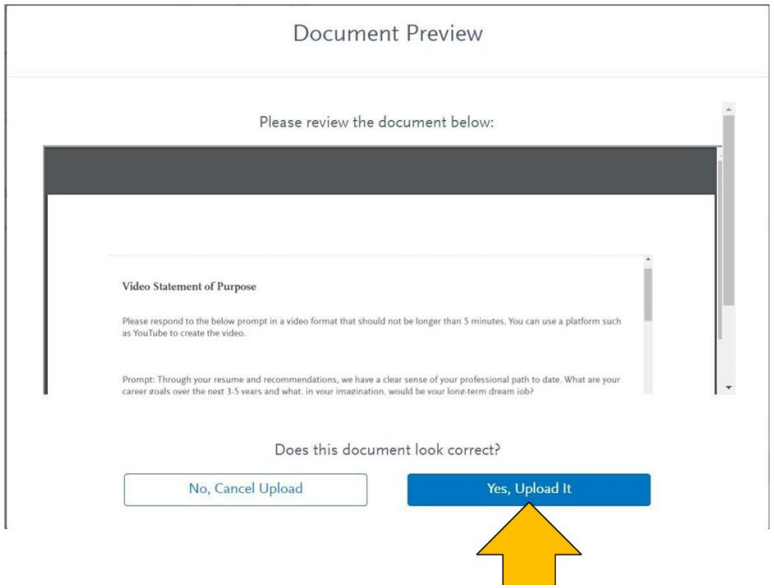

LETTERS
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Collapsed
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Requested On
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Applicant Email:
Applying to: Cal State Apply
Type: General Recommendation Letter Upload
Access: Waived
Programs: Long Beach Extension - Business Administration - Daytime Accelerated MBA

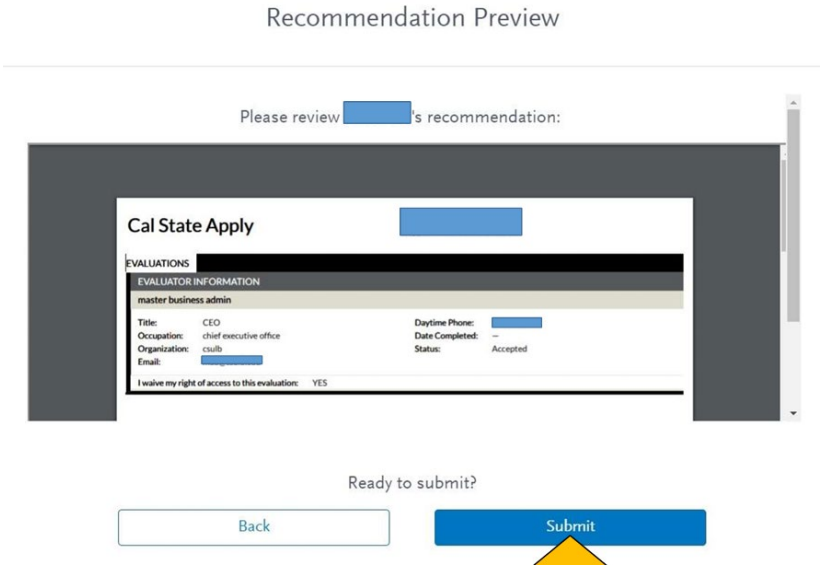

Instructions
General Evaluation Letter Upload
Note from
[redacted]
* Indicates required field
Upload Letter
* Upload Your File
Upload the letter below
Note: the file in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), Portable Document Format (.pdf), Rich Text Format (.rtf), or Plain Text File (.txt).
Drop files here to attach
or
Click to browse
Save & Exit
Preview & Submit

Preview and Submit

- Select **Preview & Submit**.
- Review the completed recommendation and any attached letter.
- If everything is correct, select **Yes, Upload It**.
- If changes are needed, select **No, Cancel Upload** and return to the request.

Saving is not submitting: Use **Save** or **Save & Exit** to return later. An account is required to access saved drafts.


Document Preview
Please review the document below:
Video Statement of Purpose
Please respond to the below prompt in a video format that should not be longer than 5 minutes. You can use a platform such as YouTube to create the video.
Prompt: Through your resume and recommendations, we have a clear sense of your professional path to date. What are your career goals over the next 3-5 years and what, in your imagination, would be your long-term dream job?
Does this document look correct?
No, Cancel Upload
Yes, Upload It


Recommendation Preview
Please review [redacted]'s recommendation:
Cal State Apply
[redacted]
EVALUATIONS
EVALUATOR INFORMATION
master business admin
Title: CEO
Occupation: chief executive office
Organization: csulb
Email:
Daytime Phone:
Date Completed: –
Status: Accepted
I waive my right of access to this evaluation: YES
Ready to submit?
Back
Submit

Key takeaways

- **Prepare early:** Keep brief notes about meaningful clinical observations.
- **Be specific:** Use examples to explain the student's strengths and growth.
- **Personalize the letter:** Reuse the structure while tailoring the evidence and recommendation.
- **Own the assessment:** Review every statement, even when using AI assistance.
- **Finish carefully:** Confirm the applicant, requirements, deadline, and completed submission.

Your firsthand observations give the letter its value.

Resources and questions

- **Writing:** AAMC/OPDA narrative residency LOR guidelines.
- **Submission:** AAMC ERAS and Liaison Letters resources.
- **Local guidance:** Evaluations, MSPE narratives, and approved AI use.