



# Essential Elements of an Excellent LoR

Presenters

Dr. J. Michael Wieting, Senior Associate Dean

Lisa Shelburne, Director of Career Services

**LMU**

DeBusk College of Osteopathic Medicine  
LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

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# Disclosures

- Dr. Wieting and Mrs. Shelburne have no financial relationships to disclose.

# Objectives

1. Demonstrate knowledge about essential elements of a well written letter of recommendation (LoR).
2. State the purpose(s) and potential benefits of a well-crafted LoR and comment upon the potential negative impact of a poorly crafted one.
3. Be able to state/ recognize common effective elements and pitfalls of LoRs.

## Features of an Effective LoR

1. Formal statement of support and advocacy for an applicant.
2. Presents well-documented, specific and succinct assessment of an applicant by a knowledge writer.
3. Comments in detail about characteristics of an applicant in the context of the program(s) to which they've applied.
4. Contains structure and elements that effectively advocate for an applicant.

## Types of LoRs

1. Standard individual LoR for applicants to residency, fellowship, etc.
2. Specialty-specific Standardized Letters of Evaluation.
3. Committee letter(s) from a contribution of writers representing a program and/ or institution.

# What to Do When Asked to Write a LoR

- Ask the applicant for additional potentially helpful documents, such as CV and personal statement.
- Ask yourself: “Do I know this person well enough to write a strongly positive, supportive LoR?”
- Set aside time adequate to write, review and upload the LoR.

## How to Say No to an LoR Request?

- Acknowledge and express gratitude for the request in a timely manner
- Offer an honest reason for declining
- Consider offering alternative assistance such as CV or PS review
- Avoid giving too many details about the decline
- It is ok to decline

## Discussion:

Have you said no to writing a  
Letter of recommendation?

If so, how did you address that?



# Important Details

- On official institutional letterhead, with address, email, and phone contact information
- Dated, addressed to “Dear Program. Director”, “Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_”, or “Dear Selection Committee”, as applicable
- Note if applicant has waived the right to see the LoR.
- Use correct gender pronoun
- Roughly 1 page (2 in exceptional cases) in length, 3-5 paragraphs, single to 1.5 spaced
- Saved in PDF format, file size not over 1 MB; not password protected. No special characters in the file name (#, @)
- Signed by author; typed name to follow signature, with credentials and title
- Carefully spell-checked and proofread
- Prose format

# LoR Ideal Structure

- Introductory/opening paragraph describing your relationship to the applicant.
- Supportive data addressing applicant's strengths, skills, experience, readiness for residency, specific details/attributes which make candidate a good fit for the desired specialty.
- Distinguishing characteristics/experiences that help set the applicant apart from peers.
- Summary/conclusion with global assessment of the applicant, noting their most positive traits/skills, reiterating key qualifications, and soliciting readers' careful consideration, ending with strong statement of endorsement.

## LoR “DO’s”

- Make sure you can write a strongly positive LoR and meet applicable deadline.
- Ask for/obtain any information you need in order to write a powerful LoR.
- Be honest and sincere, providing an individualized and unique letter.
- Carefully proofread the LoR; ensure you used applicant’s correct name and gender pronoun.
- Make sure the applicant provides you with a signed ERAS Letter Request Form (which will give your LoR a unique ID number) and upload it correctly and on time.
- Keep a file copy.
- Let applicant know when the LoR is written and submitted.
- Be honest with a requester if you feel you cannot write a strong/ positive LoR.
- Tell how you know the applicant, use specific examples, of traits you mention to highlight/ demonstrate what you've said, be clear and concise.

# Good Comments to Include

- Very helpful to the team, keen perception of procedural skills that allowed her to participate in OR procedures above the usual skill level of her peers.
- Well prepared with all information needed to formulate a treatment plan and was able to **prioritize** and integrate bits of evidence into a cohesive, logical story.
- Quickly assimilated information and put data into action.
- Presentations in a clear, concise manner, well beyond most third-year students.
- Deep thinker with a deep knowledge base, delivered well-crafted and thought-out answers to questions.
- Quickly acclimated into our clinic, its EMR and our processes.
- Use competency-based language and provide illustrative examples.
- Able to effectively apply basic science principles to clinical situations as evidenced by \_\_\_\_\_.
- Quickly grasps complex material and is able to explain it effectively to others.

## LoR “Don’ts”

- Write a LoR for someone you don’t know well enough or for whom you cannot provide a truthful strongly positive letter.
- Make general statements that aren’t illustrated/ substantiated with specific details.
- Wait until the last minute to write the LoR or, worse, fail to write/submit it.
- Include any personal information about the applicant that could show implicit bias such as age, racial/ethnic background, birthplace, marital status, children, physical features/appearance, any physical or mental health information, medications used, or financial status.
- Be too long or too short, be vague, repeat the content of the CV or transcript.

# Comments to Avoid

- Needs to read more.
- Handwork is a strength.
- Participates well in class.
- Will do great in primary care- be careful here.
- Outstanding student.
- Engaged and interested.
- Smart, enthusiastic, professional.
- Will eventually be a great physician.

# Discussion

- What information do you feel is valuable in advocating for students?
- What information should be confidential when writing letters?

# FAQ's for Uploads

- Main Application Service – Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)
- Other services: Residency CAS (new for OB 2025) Central App (can include Anesthesia and Plastic Surgery) San Francisco match (Ophthalmology)
- Military Match – Requires direct email to branch contact
- DCOM cannot upload to services



# Summary

- LoRs, submitted on time by knowledgeable writers, can powerfully advocate for applicants in an intensely competitive environment.
- Ensure you know the applicant well enough and have enough information to help you write a unique, specific, and personal LoR.
- Make sure your LoR is well constructed with all essential elements and that you have the Application Service request for the LoR.
- Carefully review and proofread your LoR to ensure accuracy, no errors, no inappropriate personal information, clichés, or general comments are provided.
- Provide the applicant a LoR that strongly advocates for them and makes you want to hire them, realizing this is actually a valuable service to the applicant and to your profession.
- Enjoy doing this- it's an honor to be asked to write a LoR.

# Questions?