CU Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

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GUIDELINES FOR WRITING COMPELLING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

To Prospective Recommendation Writers:

We recognize and appreciate the substantial time commitment that is required to write letters of recommendation for students who are applying to professional school. Each applicant is required to have a set of three to five letters of recommendation submitted in support of their application. Each individual recommendation letter is expected to speak to the specific context in which the author interacted with the applicant; taken as a group, the student's set of letters can provide the admissions committees with a well-rounded impression of the applicant's key competencies, their readiness for professional school, and their suitability for a service-based profession. The relative strength of a candidate's letters of recommendation makes a significant impact on the candidate's likelihood of acceptance to professional school.

We have provided the tips and guidelines below to support you in the effort to write letters of recommendation for applicants to professional school. If you have further questions, we are happy to talk with you and to provide you with feedback on your drafts. You may reach the Continuing Education Pre-Health Advising team at ceprehealth@colorado.edu.

Before you agree to write a letter of recommendation for a candidate:

- Please review the list of competencies on the pages that follow. The most compelling letters of recommendation are those that address three or more competencies from that list, as supported by specific, illustrative examples and anecdotes from the author's direct observation of the candidate. If you are not in a position to provide examples from direct observations within those competency categories, it is best to decline to write a letter.
- During the professional school application process, candidates must meet strict deadlines. If circumstances prevent you from writing a detailed evaluation within the time frame requested by the candidate, it is best to decline to write the letter.
- It is common for our students to use Interfolio to collect their letters of recommendation in advance of the opening of the professional school application season. Applicants are not able to view their letters in Interfolio, but University employees with administrator access to Interfolio are able to view our students' letters. We routinely view letters to ensure that they meet formatting guidelines while maintaining a strict policy of confidentiality regarding the content of those letters.

Logistics:

- Letters must include a **date**, a **handwritten signature**, and business/university **letterhead.**
- **Your letter will be sent to multiple schools.** Please use a general greeting such as "Dear Admissions Committee:" rather than addressing one particular school.
- Aim for a text length of ~¾ to 2 pages.

Letter Writing Tips:

- **Provide context:** Indicate how long you have known the applicant and the context/setting in which you interacted.
- **When providing examples/anecdotes describing the candidate's competencies, consider including the following information:**
  - The specific situation or context
  - A description of the behavior(s) you observed
  - The result or outcome of that behavior
  - (If applicable) Share observations of the ways the candidate grew or changed as a result of the experience
- **Admissions committees find comparison information helpful.** If you feel it would be supportive to the applicant, it ben be useful to identify the comparison group (e.g., students in a class you taught, students in your department, co-workers, etc.) and to rank the candidate's performance within that group.
- **There is no need to summarize other aspects of the candidate's preparation for professional school,** as the candidate's application will provide explanations of those activities and the admissions committees will have full access to the applicant's transcript and standardized test scores.
- **Prior to sharing information that could be considered sensitive,** confirm with the applicant that they are comfortable with the inclusion of that information.

Thank you for your assistance!

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Core Competencies for Entering Professional School Students in Healthcare
(adapted from the Association of American Medical Colleges' list of core competencies)

Aim to comment upon behaviors you've directly observed from <u>three or more of the categories</u> on this list, providing specific, illustrative supporting examples/anecdotes.

Understanding of and suitability for the profession:
* If you have interacted with this applicant in a clinical setting, please describe what you have observed of the candidate's understanding of the realities of the profession, their expression of intellectual curiosity in the clinical setting, and their approach to interacting with patients and staff.

Service Orientation
* Showing a commitment to something larger than oneself; demonstrating dedication to service and a commitment to making meaningful contributions that meet the needs of communities.

Empathy and Compassion
* Recognizing, understanding, and acknowledging others' experiences, feelings, perspectives, and reactions to situations; being sensitive to others' needs and feelings; and demonstrating a desire to help others and alleviate others' distress.

Cultural Awareness
* Appreciating how historical, sociocultural, political, and economic factors affect others' interactions, behaviors, and well-being; valuing diversity; and demonstrating a desire to learn about different cultures, beliefs, and values.

Cultural Humility
* Seeking out and engaging diverse and divergent perspectives with a desire to understand and willingness to adjust one's mindset; understanding a situation or idea from alternative viewpoints; reflecting on one's values, beliefs, and identities and how they may affect others; reflecting on and addressing bias in oneself and others; and fostering a supportive environment that values inclusivity.

Interpersonal Skills
* Demonstrating an awareness of how social and behavioral cues affect people's interactions and behaviors; adjusting behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; recognizing and managing one's emotions and understanding how emotions impact others or a situation; and treating others with dignity, courtesy, and respect.

Teamwork and Collaboration
* Collaborating with others to achieve shared goals and prioritizes shared goals; adjusting role between team member and leader based on one's own and others' expertise and experience; sharing information with team members and encouraging this behavior in others; and giving and accepting feedback to improve team performance.

Oral Communication
* Effectively conveying information to others using spoken words and sentences; actively listening to understand the meaning and intent behind what others say; and recognizing potential communication barriers and adjusting approach or clarifying information as needed.

Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others
* Behaving with honesty and integrity; considering multiple and/or conflicting principles and values to inform decisions; adhering to ethical principles when carrying out professional obligations; resisting pressure to engage in unethical behavior; and encouraging others to behave honestly and ethically.

Reliability and Dependability

- Demonstrating accountability for performance and responsibilities to self and others; prioritizing and fulfilling obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; and understanding consequences of not fulfilling one's responsibilities to self and others.

Resilience and Adaptability

- Persevering in challenging, stressful, or ambiguous environments or situations by adjusting behavior or approach in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles, and recognizing and seeks help and support when needed; recovering from and reflects on setbacks; and balancing personal well-being with responsibilities.

Commitment to Learning and Growth

- Practicing continuous personal and professional growth for improvement, including setting and communicating goals for learning and development; reflecting on successes, challenges, and mistakes; pursuing opportunities to improve knowledge and understanding; and asking for and incorporating feedback to learn and grow.

Critical Thinking

- Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems.

Quantitative Reasoning

- Applying quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world.

Scientific Inquiry

- Applying knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems, and formulate research questions and hypotheses; being facile in the language of the sciences and using it to participate in the discourse of science and explaining how scientific knowledge is discovered and validated.

Written Communication

- Effectively conveying information to others by using written words and sentences.

Living Systems

- Applying knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems, including biomolecules, molecules, cells, and organs.

Human Behavior

- Applying knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, sociocultural, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.

Factors that would allow the applicant to make unique contributions to the profession

- **If applicable, describe obstacles that the applicant had to overcome** and how those obstacles led to new learning and growth.
- **If applicable, explain how the applicant may contribute to a professional school's diversity**, broadly defined (e.g., background, attributes, experiences, etc.)