

## Letters of Recommendation Some tips on getting great letters

The **House Letter** is a personalized cover letter created by the Kirkland premed tutor committee. It will accompany your letters of recommendation from your professors/TF's, and include relevant excerpts from each of the letters.

You will need **at least three** recommendations in your house file. You will be able to designate **three to six letters** of recommendation that you would like sent to medical schools. We will, however, be able to quote from **any** letter in your file when we write the composite House letter. Aim for **March 1** for all letters which your relationship with the writer is completed (*at least 3-4 letters*). The absolute deadline for **ALL** letters to be at the House is **April 1, 2018**.

You must ask spring-term instructors for letters before the end of term. Any individual letters of recommendation arriving after **April 1, 2018** may not be quoted in your House letter, but can be sent along with your House packet for submission to medical schools.

- Aim for one-to-two letters from science instructors, one-to-two letters from a non-science instructor, and one-to-two letters from an extra-curricular supervisor. One of the science or non-science letters should be from the area of your concentration. If you have had significant laboratory experience, a letter from your advisor might also be a good idea. If you are writing a thesis, your thesis adviser is another strong option for a letter.
- Do not be intimidated to ask, "Do you think you would be able to write me a **strong letter** of recommendation?" Professors want to help, not hurt, so if there is any hesitation, kindly withdraw the request for a recommendation.
- Go for those who know your strengths and who you think want to see you in medicine. A great letter from an English professor is worth much more than a mediocre one from a Nobel laureate in the Biochemistry Department.
- For large courses where you were not able to get to know the professor well, a letter from a TF is completely fine. If a TF is writing for you, **find out if the professor is willing to cosign the letter**. This is very common. Letters by undergraduate TA's are not acceptable as recommendations for medical school.
- **ASK NOW!** A rushed letter is not likely to be a great letter. When requesting a letter, give the writer a reasonable deadline such as 3-4 weeks from that day. Don't say, "I need this at the House by **April 1, 2018**" because that gives the writer too much time and they may put it off or forget. Make sure to **follow up** with the House Office and your recommender! A well-timed thank you card will help get your letter in on time. It is **your responsibility** to be aware of the letters, or lack of them, in your file.

**Give each person who has agreed to write you a recommendation the following material. Make it as easy as possible for them to support your application the best that they can!**

1. **Cover Letter:** One page detailing your interest in medicine and what you would like them to comment on in their letter. Highlight significant experiences you have had with the letter writer, such as the topic of your final research paper, an overview of lab projects, or achievements in an extracurricular activity.

Don't be shy! For example, it's acceptable to tell your work supervisor that you'd like them to comment on your organizational abilities, your leadership skills, and how you interact with your coworkers.

2. **Resume:** Be sure to highlight your medical background and experience.

3. **Copy of your Personal Statement** (even a draft). Or, if that's not feasible, an explanation of what motivates you to go into medicine in 2-3 paragraphs.

4. **A Recommendation Waiver Form:** All letters must be mailed to the House Office along with the waiver form! We cannot use a letter without a waiver form. These forms are available on the Kirkland Website (<http://kirkland.harvard.edu/home>)

5. **Instructions on electronic sending or a stamped, pre-addressed envelope:**

Electronic: A PDF of the letter on **professional letterhead** with the writer's signature AND a signed waiver form can be emailed to [matarazz@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:matarazz@fas.harvard.edu) and [k.premed@gmail.com](mailto:k.premed@gmail.com)

Mail: The envelope should be addressed to: Assistant Dean's Office, Kirkland House, 95 Dunster Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

6. **A Thank you!** Letter: A strategically timed letter can actually serve as a reminder as well as a sincere Thank you!

If your letter writer asks for **guidelines** on how to write a letter of recommendation for medical schools, please refer them to the following resource on the OCS website: <http://ocs.fas.harvard.edu/letters-recommendation>

**Logistics of submitting letters to the House Office for current applicants:**

Virtual Evals (VE) is a web-based system for transmitting letters of evaluation to medical schools. The House Letter and your 3-6 letters of recommendation are scanned and uploaded on the website. The schools you've applied to will then be able to each download a copy of your recommendation packet.

- Once your house letter is complete and the entire packet of letters is ready to be sent out, you will be notified by email to send Linda Matarazzo and [k.premed@gmail.com](mailto:k.premed@gmail.com) the following information: **your name, AMCAS ID, AMCAS Letter ID, TMSAS ID** (if applying to Texas schools), **and an alphabetical list of schools to which you are applying.**
- Once your packet has been submitted on VirtualEvals, you will receive a confirmation email from VirtualEvals.
- If you decide to apply to more schools after this time, notify Linda Matarazzo by email to add them to your list of schools.

Most medical schools are participants (including Texas schools; see link for full list).  
<http://www.virtualevals.org/receivers/>

On secondary applications **DO NOT LIST THE NAMES OF YOUR INDIVIDUAL LETTER WRITERS.** Instead, simply indicate that a composite letter will be sent from your premed advisory committee (this avoids delays in processing due to late letters). If the school has to know who is writing the House letter, provide the Allston Burr Resident Dean's name only.

**Thanks for being patient!** House Letters usually require at least two months to be completed. The process is designed to ensure you the best possible letter. It involves reviewing your Kirkland Personal Information Form, all of your letters of recommendation, in addition to meeting and discussing your goals with you. An initial draft of the letter is written by your premedical advisor. The draft is then reviewed and edited by the Masters, the Assistant Dean, and the Resident Premed Tutors. The House letter is attached to the front of your individual letters and the entire packet is scanned and made available to all of your designated schools on Virtual Evals. The process involves much time and many people, so thanks for being patient. It will be worth it, as no applicants from other institutions have anything that comes close to a Kirkland House Premedical Committee Letter.