



Guidelines for Recommendation Letters for Pre-Health Students

To Letter Writers:

We thank you for agreeing to write a letter of recommendation for an aspiring healthcare professional. We realize that you are taking valuable time from your busy schedules to support this candidate. We want to give you some guidelines to help you make this task more manageable.

Role of the Premedical Advisory Committee (PAC):

The role of the Premedical Advisory Committee is to advise and evaluate Columbia undergraduates and alumni who are applying to a health professional school, most often, medical or dental school. The outcome of the committee evaluation process is a comprehensive letter that is sent to all of the schools to which the student has applied.

PAC letter of evaluation

This letter is written on a student's request and only after the student completes a pre-applicant process. The pre-applicant process includes submission of letters of recommendation, resume, autobiography, supplemental information form, as well as an interview with the PAC.

The final committee evaluation includes this comprehensive letter of evaluation written by the Premedical Advisory Committee followed by the letters of recommendation that the student submits as a part of the committee application process.

A letter written for a pre-health student will not only be viewed by the Premedical Advisory Committee but will also be sent along to the health professional schools which the student has applied. Please be sure that your letters are written professionally, on official letterhead, and include your signature.

What are we looking for?

The PAC relies heavily on information provided by the student's letters of recommendation. We are looking for specific assessments of the applicants' abilities in the area in which you supervised their work. When you comment on these abilities, please be specific. For example, citing the topic of a student's seminar paper or the subjects on which the student was most vocal in class discussion helps to make a recommendation more convincing. We have found that the most useful letters include the following:

- 1) **Explanation of relationship between applicant and referee**
- 2) **Information on applicant's personal characteristics** (i.e., integrity, reliability, determination, motivation, initiative, honesty, professionalism, leadership, maturity, empathy, service orientation etc.)
- 3) **Information regarding applicant's social skills** (i.e., interpersonal skills, ability to interact with others in groups, ability to establish peer relationships, open-mindedness, and ability to navigate difference)
- 4) **Comparative information:** How does this student compare to others whom you have taught or with whom you have worked?
- 5) **Assessment of applicant's academic potential:** (if applicable to relationship) – Is this student ready for the rigors of their intended program of study? Do they have good critical thinking and problem solving skills and a growth mindset?

Important Submission information:

1. All letters should be addressed generally (i.e. Dear Admissions Committee)
2. You will be sent a link by the applicant which will enable you to upload your letter directly to the Premedical Advisory Committee Portal. The applicant will be notified when your confidential letter has been received in the system.

Timeline:

To meet student's needs for the application process, we ask that you submit your letters no later than **June 1st**. This timing is extremely important in order for the PAC to complete the Committee Evaluation in a timely fashion. If for any reason you are unable to meet this deadline, please contact the Office of Pre-Professional Advising preprofessional@columbia.edu. Thank you for supporting one of our pre-health students.

*Letter writers may also email recommendations to preprofessional@columbia.edu, provided the document (PDF preferred) appears on letterhead with a scanned handwritten signature.



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