



## Dos and Don'ts of Asking for a Letter of Recommendation

### Whom to Ask:

Selecting a letter writer is an important step in fortifying your application. Choosing the right writer affords strong advocacy and credibility to your package, and it can even unlock hidden stories or character traits that help bring your packet to life. In short, a letter of recommendation is another venue in which to showcase what makes you unique and desirable through the eyes of others.

A letter writer must share this vision, have the time and interest in participating, and possess the professional credibility to back you up. Although superstar names are great, forego the temptation of asking a well-known or well-connected faculty member if you've had little meaningful interaction with them. By the same token, picking a junior faculty member in his or her first year may do little more than add color commentary to your file, as lack of faculty experience may lead to a credibility gap.

Consider cultivating these relationships early and aim to ask someone that knows you in many spheres: mentorship, educational, clinical, and research. A good letter writer should be friendly, receptive, and responsive, and they should have the time to write a good letter—or know you well enough and be excited enough by your application to find the time.

### DO:

- Ask someone who you feel knows you well
- Ask someone who you feel is invested in your success and will spend the time necessary to create a solid letter
- Ask someone whom you worked with for more than a week or two and in multiple venues (clinic, consults, research, etc.)
- Preferably ask someone in the field of Gastroenterology—the majority of your LORs should come from GI

### DON'T:

- Ask a big name just because they're a big name
- Ask a friend in the class above you who just graduated and joined faculty
- Ask someone with whom you either didn't do your very best or had an unlucky rotation
- Ask someone with whom you only worked for a few days
- Exclusively recruit non-Gastroenterologists

## **How to Ask:**

If you're asking the right person, that person is probably busy—really busy. Do them the courtesy of asking far in advance of the uploading deadline. It can be awkward asking for updates from someone so senior who is doing you such a big favor; however, it's helpful and important for both of you. When initially asking, consider agreeing on a timeline whereby you can check on the progress of the LOR. Make sure your writers have all the information they'll need to write on your behalf. Your best bet is to schedule a meeting with them to discuss your application in detail. Send them copies of your CV and personal statement. ERAS can be tricky—help them out by sending them the link and clear upload instructions. Be polite, but be persistent. Finally, don't bark up the wrong tree. There is a fine line between someone being busy and someone blowing you off. As Kenny Rogers said, "You got to know when to hold them / know when to fold them."

### **DO:**

- Ask well in advance of the deadline, and make the deadline clear
- Set calendar reminders for both of you to check on progress
- Give copies of your CV and personal statement
- Clearly spell out the process of uploading letters in ERAS
- Be persistent, but polite
- Take no for an answer—if someone is either too busy or doesn't feel comfortable writing on your behalf, they're not the right person to join your application squad
- Thank your writers profusely

### **DON'T:**

- Be vague with deadlines
- Ask for a letter and then check back in a day before it's due
- Leave your writer hanging with no upload directions or content direction
- Take their support for granted
- Forget to pay it forward later in your career