

# Writing Effective Letters of Recommendation

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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH

# Key Parts of the Letter

- » Use letterhead
- » The letter writer's qualifications
- » Relationship to the student
- » Skills of the student
  - ~ Frame relative to competencies
  - ~ Specific accomplishments
- » Closing comments
- » Disclaimer

This applicant has waived the right to see this letter under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. This letter represents my own personal opinions and not necessarily those of the Department of Surgery or Loma Linda University Health.



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Namm".

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## ACGME

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- Medical knowledge
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Patient care
- System-based practice
- Practice-based learning and improvement
- Professionalism



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# Avoid Implicit Bias

## Influence of Gender on Surgical Residency Applicants' Recommendation Letters

 Check for updates

Florence E Turrentine, PhD, RN, Caitlin N Dreisbach, MSDS, RN, Amanda R St Ivany, PhD, RN, John B Hanks, MD, FACS, Anneke T Schroen, MD, MPH, FACS

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- » Stay professional
  - ~ Use names and/or titles
  - ~ **No** physical descriptors
- » Highlight accomplishments
- » Consider length of letter
- » Don't raise doubt
- » **Avoid** stereotyping words
  - ~ Competent, articulate - **Black**
  - ~ Warm, delightful - **Female**
  - ~ Caring, compassionate, organized, dedicated, tactful - **Trite**

### Word Bank

Exceptional  
Superb  
Stellar  
Successful  
Accomplished  
Outstanding  
Skilled  
Knowledgeable  
Insightful  
Resourceful  
Confident  
Ambitious  
Intellectual  
Phenomenal  
Talented  
Brilliant  
Smart



# Best Practice

## Best Practices in Letters of Recommendation for General Surgery Residency: Results of Expert Stakeholder Focus Groups

Robert Naples, DO, MEHP,<sup>a,b</sup> Judith C. French, PhD,<sup>a,b</sup> and Jeremy M. Lipman, MD, MHPE<sup>a,b</sup>

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J Surg Ed 2020

### Before You Write the Letter:

1. Meet with the applicant
  - a. Discuss any red flags
  - b. If no direct contact with applicant, gather information about personality and/or character traits
    - May need to refer to other faculty for personal anecdotes
2. Discuss LOR with applicant
  - a. What will you say?
  - b. Determine mutualistic fit
3. Obtain applicants personal statement (Optional)
4. A letter from the chair can be considered, but only if they have worked with the student in some clinical capacity

### When Writing the LOR:

1. Provide background
  - a. Academic title
  - b. How long have you worked with students?
2. Provide context in which you know the student
  - a. What settings have you worked with the student?
  - b. How long have you known the student?
  - c. Is recommendation based on direct or indirect observation?
3. Address red flags and professionalism issues
4. List and explain personal characteristics with specific examples
5. Provide clear anchors and descriptions for any coded language (if used)

### Don't:

1. Write LOR for applicants you don't know
2. Write more than one page
3. Repeat the applicant's CV
4. List characteristics or personality traits without providing specific examples
5. Forget to double check names and pronouns for candidates
6. Write about potentially biasing information (race, ethnicity, or medical history)

