THE MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICATION SYSTEM

# Recommendation Letter Strategy Pack

Choose the right writers. Give them the right evidence. Keep every letter moving.

Earth Hasassri, MD

2027 AMCAS cycle
Strategy guide + fill-in template

# Build a portfolio, not a pile

The goal is not the maximum number of letters. It is the smallest set that satisfies every school and adds distinct evidence to your file.

1

### Map requirements

Record each school's minimum, maximum, required writer types, and committee-letter policy.

2

### Cover the core

A common planning set is two science faculty letters plus one non-science or other academic letter.

3

### Add only signal

Use one research, clinical, service, or employer letter only when it adds firsthand evidence not already covered.

## Your default letter bench

| Role | What this writer should prove | Use when |
|---|---|---|
| **Science faculty 1** | Analytical ability, scientific reasoning, disciplined learning | Required by a school or central to your academic case |
| **Science faculty 2** | Independent thinking, growth, performance across challenge | A second science instructor is required or meaningfully different |
| **Non-science / academic** | Writing, discussion, perspective-taking, communication | A school requests it or it broadens your academic picture |
| **Research mentor** | Scientific inquiry, ownership, resilience, collaboration | Research is a major application theme or MD-PhD fit matters |
| **Clinical / service supervisor** | Reliability, empathy, teamwork, service orientation | They observed sustained, substantive work directly |
| **Employer** | Professionalism, leadership, judgment, accountability | You are nontraditional or employment is a major recent experience |

**School rules win.** Some schools accept a committee letter in place of individual letters; others specify instructors, departments, recent supervisors, or maximum counts. Requirements change. Recheck each official admissions page before assigning letters.

## Decision rule

Keep a letter only if it is **required** or it adds a new dimension with specific evidence. Do not send an "extra" letter merely because AMCAS allows up to 10 entries.

# Ask people with evidence, not impressive titles

The best writer can describe how you behaved, what changed because of your work, and how you compare with peers.

## Prioritize this writer

- ☐ Observed you directly and repeatedly
- ☐ Can recall two or more specific situations
- ☐ Knows your growth, not only your final result
- ☐ Can assess traits relevant to medical training
- ☐ Can meet the deadline and follow submission rules
- ☐ Responds enthusiastically to a request for a *strong* letter

## Usually avoid

- A famous person who barely knows you
- A family member, family friend, or peer
- A physician you only shadowed passively
- An instructor whose only evidence is your grade
- A supervisor with whom you had unresolved conflict
- Anyone who sounds hesitant, asks you to write the entire letter, or cannot promise a candid assessment

## The evidence test

Before asking, finish this sentence for the writer:

> "Dr. Chen saw me _____, which demonstrates _____."

If you cannot name an observed action and a relevant quality, the relationship may be too thin.

## Interpret the response

| | |
|---|---|
| **"Absolutely."** | Proceed; confirm logistics. |
| **"I can, but I'm busy."** | Clarify the deadline; offer an easy decline. |
| **"Remind me who you are."** | Rebuild the relationship or choose another writer. |
| **"Send me a draft."** | Offer a story bank and talking points instead; the assessment must remain theirs. |

## Special situations

**Large lecture course**
Use office hours, projects, teaching-assistant input, and a concise memory refresher. Ask whether the professor can personally endorse the letter.

**Years out of school**
Check school policies for alternatives. Favor recent supervisors while reconnecting early with academic writers.

**Committee process**
Start with your advising office. Internal interviews, forms, and deadlines may precede AMCAS by months.

# Strong letters prove; generic letters praise

Admissions committees already have your grades and résumé. A useful letter adds witnessed behavior, context, consequences, and calibrated comparison.

| Generic signal | Stronger signal |
|---|---|
| “Earth was an excellent student.” | Names the difficult assignment or discussion, what you did differently, and the result. |
| Repeats GPA, MCAT, or résumé entries. | Explains what the writer personally observed that the application cannot show. |
| Lists adjectives: hardworking, kind, smart. | Uses a scene: situation → your action → effect → interpretation. |
| “Top student” with no context. | Defines the comparison group, timeframe, and reason for the ranking. |
| Describes the course, lab, or institution at length. | Keeps the applicant at the center. |
| Uses sweeping advocacy. | Offers a candid assessment of readiness, strengths, and growth. |

## The five-part anatomy

### 1. Relationship

How long, in what role, how much direct contact.

### 2. Specific observations

Two or three concrete moments, not a trait inventory.

### 3. Consequence

What improved, changed, or was learned because of the behavior.

### 4. Calibrated comparison

Compared with whom, across what period, and on what basis.

### 5. Bottom-line assessment

A clear judgment about readiness for medical school and likely contribution to a learning community.

## Quality-control questions for your briefing packet

- [ ] Did I give the writer at least two stories they personally witnessed?
- [ ] Did I identify two or three competencies they are uniquely positioned to assess?
- [ ] Did I include outcomes, feedback, improvement, or comparison context?
- [ ] Did I flag any sensitive information that requires my explicit permission before inclusion?
- [ ] Did I avoid scripting conclusions the writer cannot honestly support?

> AAMC guidance emphasizes accurate assessment, direct observation, context for grades or scores, permission before sharing sensitive information, and meaningful comparison information.

FREE PREVIEW · WHAT'S INSIDE THE FULL GUIDE

# Recommendation Letter Strategy Pack

You've read the opening pages. Here is everything else the guide covers:

- The operating plan: a portfolio, not a pile
- Writer selection: evidence beats impressive titles
- Asking early — and making declining safe
- The fill-in brag sheet that gets you a strong letter
- Distinct evidence across letters: a complete portrait
- AMCAS rules summarized for the 2027 cycle
- Follow-up, gratitude, and verification checklist

**Get the full guide — $12**