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LOR Sources:

Submitting Letters of Recommendation (LORs) is optional. Should you decide to include them as part of your application, what follows are suggested guidelines on how best to submit them.

Before you enter your LOR information in this section, it is suggested you contact the individuals to confirm they will author your LOR and to find out their preferred email address.

The LOR requires completion of two parts, a rating of attributes (Part I) and a letter (Part II). The narrative can be uploaded to the online recommendation portal. Accepted formats for uploads are .pdf, .doc (Word), .rtf (Rich Text Format) or .txt (ASCII Text File) files only. Uploaded letters must be less than 2MB in size. The narrative can also be typed directly into the space provided, or cut and pasted from a word processor. Because some word processor characters will not correctly translate into text, Recommenders are strongly encouraged to compose their letter in a text-only word processor (e.g., Notepad, not Word), review the letter for errors, then cut and paste the final version into the text box. The limit for entered comments is 4500 characters or less.

Designate your Recommenders early in the application process. We strongly encourage you to enter your LOR information first to expedite their receipt of the Recommendation Request Form. Because OptomCAS recommendation requests may be caught by spam filters, applicants are encouraged to contact their Recommenders to ask them to allow their email systems to “permit” the OptomCAS reference mail address: optomcasinfo@optomcas.org.

Who should write my letters?

OptomCAS allows applicants to submit up to 4 letters.

Possible LOR sources:

- A professor with whom you have done personal work (such as assisted on a specific project or served as a TA or reader), or with whom you took a course.
- An employer or extracurricular activity advisor who can comment about your maturity, diligence, and conscientiousness.
- An optometrist who would write an LOR on your behalf describing your attributes as related to being a health care provider.

Do not send LORs from coworkers, someone you have supervised, relatives, or personal and family friends. These are inappropriate and can be detrimental to the review of your application.

How and where do I send my Letters of Recommendation?

The applicant will provide the name, email address and phone number for a maximum of four (4) people providing LORs. OptomCAS will send an email evaluation request to the Recommender with information on how to electronically submit their LOR.

What does it mean to “waive my right of access” to my letter of reference?

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) gives applicants the right to access letters of reference written unless they choose to waive their right of inspection and review. Prior to requesting a reference from an evaluator, you must indicate whether you will waive your rights. OptomCAS will display your waiver decision to your evaluator and designated Optometry programs. Optometry programs may interpret references as more honest and candid if you waive your right to see the letters. If you decide not to waive your right to the reference, then you must contact the evaluator or the Optometry admissions office directly to view the reference and you will be asked to explain your reasons for your choice during the interview(s). OptomCAS will NEVER provide a copy of your reference to you, even if you have not waived your right of access. Your waiver decision on the OptomCAS application serves the same purpose as a legal signature and is binding. Once your reference is received electronically, you cannot make changes to your waiver decision.

I’m a year away from applying. I have a professor now who I’d like to have write an LOR for me. Can an LOR be written ahead of time?

You cannot collect LORs in advance and hold them. In your situation, the best thing to do would be to ask the professor to go ahead and compose an LOR and store it electronically. Explain to the professor that along with your application, you will submit their contact information and that OptomCAS will contact them with instructions to upload the LOR.

Explain also to the professor that they will be required to fill out the “rating of attributes” form along with the LOR. They will have to remember enough about you to complete this form which asks questions about various personal aspects of the applicant. Some of the information is done with checkboxes (objective aspect) and some with comments (subjective aspect). If either the professor or you think this will not be possible, for the professor to be able to provide this additional information in a year’s time, then you’d be best advised to wait to get an LOR from a recommender who can do so. Perhaps selecting another recommender and a more current LOR would be a better option.

General Instructions:

For success with the process of acquiring an LOR, it is recommended that the applicant make up a “LOR Request Kit.” This kit is designed to formalize the request made to the recommender to be part of the LOR process on your behalf. To set the stage and get organized, assemble a folder to make your presentation, which should contain the following:

- A formal cover letter
- Handling instructions

- Contact information: for you and OptomCAS
- Copy the LOR instructions from the OptomCAS website or this FAQ and include them
- Thank you note with an appropriate gift card—a very nice touch!

Use a qualify folder to make a great presentation. In a formal cover letter, give the author “guidelines” as to what you are asking them to “witness” in the LOR. For example, if it is an employer, explain why you would have chosen him or her as a character witness—someone who has interacted with you over a long period of time and can give testimony to character traits of being reliable, honest, a good worker and team player...etc. LOR authors are notorious for getting writer’s block—they postpone writing the LOR, overwhelmed by the notion that they don’t know what to write. This guideline suggestion helps them to get over their “writer’s block” by knowing what specific areas and character traits they should address in an LOR. Explain the OptomCAS form with the list of attributes that will also require their completion.

Explain the admissions cycle timeline and give them a suitable deadline as to when the LOR needs to be ready for submission. If you’ve made arrangements through OptomCAS to arrange for electronic submission of the LOR, explain the guidelines on how to make this a successful transaction (see instructions about recommender email contact and spam filters provided under “How Will LORs Be Handled By OptomCAS.”).

Compose a “thank you” card along with a suitable gift certificate. This is a nice touch, and communicates that you understand that the time they spend on the request is valuable, and also lets them know you are grateful. I recommend a Starbucks gift certificate with a note that says something like “Thank you for your time and have a cup of coffee on me to show my gratitude.” This is all common courtesy and perhaps, will make the entire process work out to everyone’s mutual benefit.

A word to the wise: make sure you follow-up on your LOR requests. Procrastination can ruin an otherwise well-planned admissions timeline. State this intent in the cover letter so you don’t sound rude when you do make the call and follow-up on your LOR’s progress.

Above all, make sure the entire transaction is a professional one!

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