



Women in Surgery Committee

facs.org

Letters of Recommendation Guide and Resource Bank

The American College of Surgeons (ACS) Women in Surgery Committee created this Letters of Recommendation Guide and Resource Bank for use when writing letters of recommendation for surgeons at all levels of training, including medical students. Based on reviewing research and successful letters of recommendation for advancement, tenure, and awards, this resource outlines general principles to guide letter structure, notable words and phrases, things to avoid, and examples of successful letters of recommendation.

The Guide and Resource Bank does not guarantee acceptance of letters you write.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Aim for 350 to 450 words
- Use superlatives
- Demonstrate knowledge of the person and use their name throughout
- Use objective and subjective comparison points
- Use standout adjectives
- Use exceptional and explicit examples
- Focus on leadership, performance, scholarship, and achievements
- Reference any awards

THINGS TO AVOID

- Damning with faint praise
- Raising questions
- General terms (i.e., delightful, hardworking, work ethic, caring, support of patients, doubt raisers, physical description)
- The phrase *"If I can provide more information..."*
- The phrase *"As far as I'm aware..."*

NOTABLE POSITIVE WORDS AND PHRASES

- Distinct privilege/pleasure
- Remarkable
- Leader with impacts and outcomes
- Educator
- Accomplishments (list)
- Achievements (list)
- Outstanding work
- Vision
- Innovator
- Outstanding mentor
- Inspirational
- Champion
- Excellence
- Motivating
- Exemplary
- Overwhelming productivity
- Sustained excellence
- Sought after mentor

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

- Describe your role and relationship to the individual and how the individual meets or exceeds the criteria your hospital/organization/institution/business has for the role.
- When writing about training, consider using the sentence, *"We want to attract this person to our program."*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Standardized Reference Letter for Medical Students Applying to General Surgery Programs](#)
- [Influence of Gender on Surgical Residency Applicants' Recommendation Letters](#)
- [Letters of Recommendation for Surgical Residencies: What They Say and What They Mean](#)



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS
Inspiring Quality:
Highest Standards, Better Outcomes

100+years