

## Any Advice about Letters of Recommendation?

Letters of Recommendation (LORs) are required from three different sources. These are three **suggested** sources but you can use any combination you wish:

- An optometrist who can state through documented experience that you know what the profession of optometry entails and possibly a statement about your suitability to be a healthcare provider, specifically a doctor.
- 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.

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 Will LORs Be Handled By OptomCAS?

Letters of Recommendation are critical to the review of your application. Before you enter your LOR information in the section of your OptomCAS application, it is suggested you contact the individuals to confirm they will author your LOR and to find out which format they would prefer (electronic or paper). If they choose to submit your LOR, please confirm their preferred contact e-mail address.

**The LOR requires completion of two parts: a rating of attributes (Part I) and a letter (Part II).** The narrative can be typed directly into the space provided or can be 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. **OptomCAS is currently NOT set up to receive PDF formatted LORs.**

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](mailto:optomcasinfo@optomcas.org).

Check the status of your Recommenders responses through the Status Section on the main page of the application. Those who use the electronic LOR format will automatically receive a duplicate request one time per month until they either submit the requested recommendation or deny the request.

Finally, it is not necessary to wait until your Recommenders have responded to submit your application.

## How and Where Do I Send My Letters of Recommendation?

Applicants should not send LORs directly to OptomCAS; all LORs need to come directly from the Recommender to OptomCAS.

Enter up to four (4) evaluator names on your OptomCAS application. Recommenders can submit electronic letters of recommendation (preferred method) or paper references to OptomCAS.

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The applicant will provide the names, addresses and email addresses of a maximum of four (4) people providing LORs. OptomCAS will send an evaluation to the recommender to be completed and returned.

If your Recommender chooses to submit an electronic LOR, which is the preferred method, enter only their e-mail address and leave the mailing address fields blank.

If your Recommender chooses to submit a paper LOR, complete the mailing address fields and leave the e-mail address blank. For paper-format LORs, you will need to print the appropriate forms and send these to your Recommender(s) to complete. These forms will be made available and printable if you select the paper format option and will not be made available until your application is opened.

### **Can I Send a Committee Letter of Recommendation?**

Yes, SCCO will accept a Committee Letter and Composite Letters. It counts as one LOR.

Some pre-health advising offices compile academic/personal information and will also coordinate the collection of LORs in order to provide a "Committee Letter" for pre-optometry students. If the Committee Letter of Recommendation is a compilation from several individuals and contains one Recommendation Request Form and one letter, it will be considered as one LOR. The pre-health advisor or individual writing the recommendation must complete the rating of attributes on the Recommendation Request Form; OptomCAS will accept the name of a college pre-health profession advisor in lieu of the evaluator(s) on the recommendation form.

### **Can I use a Letter Service?**

College and university letter services may submit recommendations to OptomCAS.

However, applicants who are submitting letters through college and university letter services cannot submit letters that are dated more than two years (24 months) prior to the opening of the current OptomCAS session. As an example, for the 2009-2010 application cycle, only letters filed through a college and university letter service from July 15, 2007 and onward will be considered.

If you are submitting LORs through a letter service, you are strongly encouraged to have the original author(s) of the LORs complete the rating of attributes, which is Part I of the Recommendation Request Form.

Please note that while OptomCAS will accept the rating of attributes, which is Part I of the Recommendation Request Form, from a college official who is a designee for the college or university's letter service office, applicants should also check with the individual programs for which they plan to apply to confirm that Recommendation Request Forms completed by a third-party will be accepted.

### **Can Advisors Use Virtual Evals?**

No, OptomCAS will not receive LORs through Virtual Evals.

### **Can I Utilize the Letter Holding Service, Interfolio?**

OptomCAS does accept recommendations from Interfolio or letter packets. Create a "paper" recommendation account in the application under your advisor's name and then, send the packet into OptomCAS. OptomCAS will not accept "electronic" files from Interfolio.

### **Can LORs be co-signed by a Faculty and Teaching Assistant?**

Yes, a LOR from a teaching assistant must be co-signed by a faculty person. This requirement applies not only to the LOR (Part II of the requirement) but to the rating of attributes (Part I of the requirement) as well. Make sure

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there is a double signature line on both Part I and II for signatures from both the teaching assistant and the professor. This LOR cannot be submitted electronically. It must be submitted through the U.S. mail.

**May I specify which schools receive which LORs?**

All LORs submitted will be sent to all schools. There is no option to discern which schools get which LORs.

**One of my recommenders has procrastinated and the LOR is not ready for submission to OptomCAS. Will this hold up my chance to receive an interview invitation?**

No. Should you qualify for an interview invitation, you would be given the opportunity to interview even though you have a missing LOR. Should you interview well and be accepted, as a condition of your acceptance, the missing LOR would need to be supplied through OptomCAS.

Recommenders can be notorious procrastinators. Never hold up submitted your application because of a recommender who doesn't have an LOR ready.

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### **General Instructions:**

I recommend that the applicant make up a “LOR Request Kit” which is designed to make the formal request to the recommender to be part of the LOR process on your behalf. To set the stage and get organized, start with a folder which makes a great presentation. The folder should contain:

- A formal cover letter
- Handling instructions
- Contact information: for you and OptomCAS
- Copy the LOR instructions from the OptomCAS website and include them
- Thank you note with appropriate gift card

Use a 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, says you value their time and also, let’s them know you are grateful. I like a Starbuck’s 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 whole 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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