



LETTERS OF REC: CONFIDENTIAL VS. NON-CONFIDENTIAL

Under the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), you are guaranteed the right of access to the contents of any evaluation letter you request from a recommender unless you specifically waive that right.

Professional schools typically have a strong preference for confidential letters (that is, letters for which the applicant has waived his/her right to read the letter) because they assume that confidential evaluations will be more candid. As a result, more weight may be assigned to such letters. The vast majority of letters submitted to professional schools are do so with a confidentiality agreement in place.

However, you should consider the pros and cons of keeping and waiving your right to read your letters of recommendation and make the decision that makes you feel most comfortable. Whatever your decision, you should apply that decision to ALL of your letters – you should either keep your right to read ALL of your letters or waive your right to read ALL of the letters.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DECIDING TO RETAIN ACCESS

- You will know the information schools have and therefore can prepare for interviews accordingly.
- It may relieve stress and anxiety to know exactly what has been said.
- Factual mistakes in the letter can be corrected, if the writer chooses to make those corrections.
- If you conclude that the letter is unfavorable, you can choose not to have it sent out. (If you are participating in our Committee Letter/Pre-Health Advisor Letter Process and decide to retain access to your traditional letters, please arrange to review them *before* a final copy is sent to our office.
- By reading a subjective evaluation, you have a chance to benefit from criticism.
- Be aware that a potential recommender may choose not to write a letter for you if you retain access.
- If you retain access, you need to be prepared to explain your reasons for your choice during interview(s).
- If you retain access, a member of an admissions committee at a health professional school receiving the letter might tentatively draw one or more of the following conclusions:
 - The evaluation may be less candid because the writer knew that the student would see it. As a result, less weight may be assigned to such letters.
 - The student wanted to discuss the letter with the recommender/evaluator before the final draft was written.
 - The student feels a moral obligation to exercise his/her civil rights.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DECIDING TO WAIVE ACCESS

- If your recommender knows you well, and has said that he/she can write a letter in support of your candidacy, you may feel reassured that the person will not include inaccuracies or unfair statements in the letter.
- If you waive access, a member of an admissions committee might tentatively draw one or more of the following conclusions:
 - The student has nothing to conceal
 - The student has confidence in her/his ability to choose recommenders and did not feel it was necessary to review the letter before it was sent.
 - The student does not feel a moral obligation to exercise his/her civil rights in this way.
 - (It is, of course, impossible to know how each individual receiving the letters may react to the fact that a student did or did not exercise their rights under FERPA.)