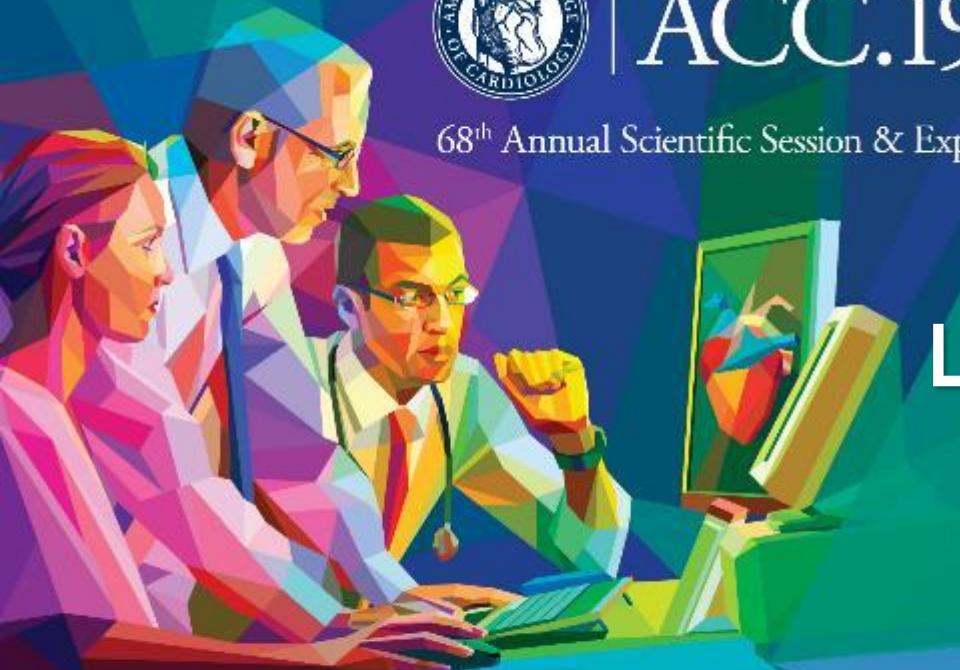




ACC.19[®]

68th Annual Scientific Session & Expo



NEW
ORLEANS
MARCH 16 - 18
2019

How to Write a Good and Honest Letter of Recommendation

Katie Berlacher, MD MS, FACC
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
@kberlacher

“Fantasy Land” – R.Friedman, 1983

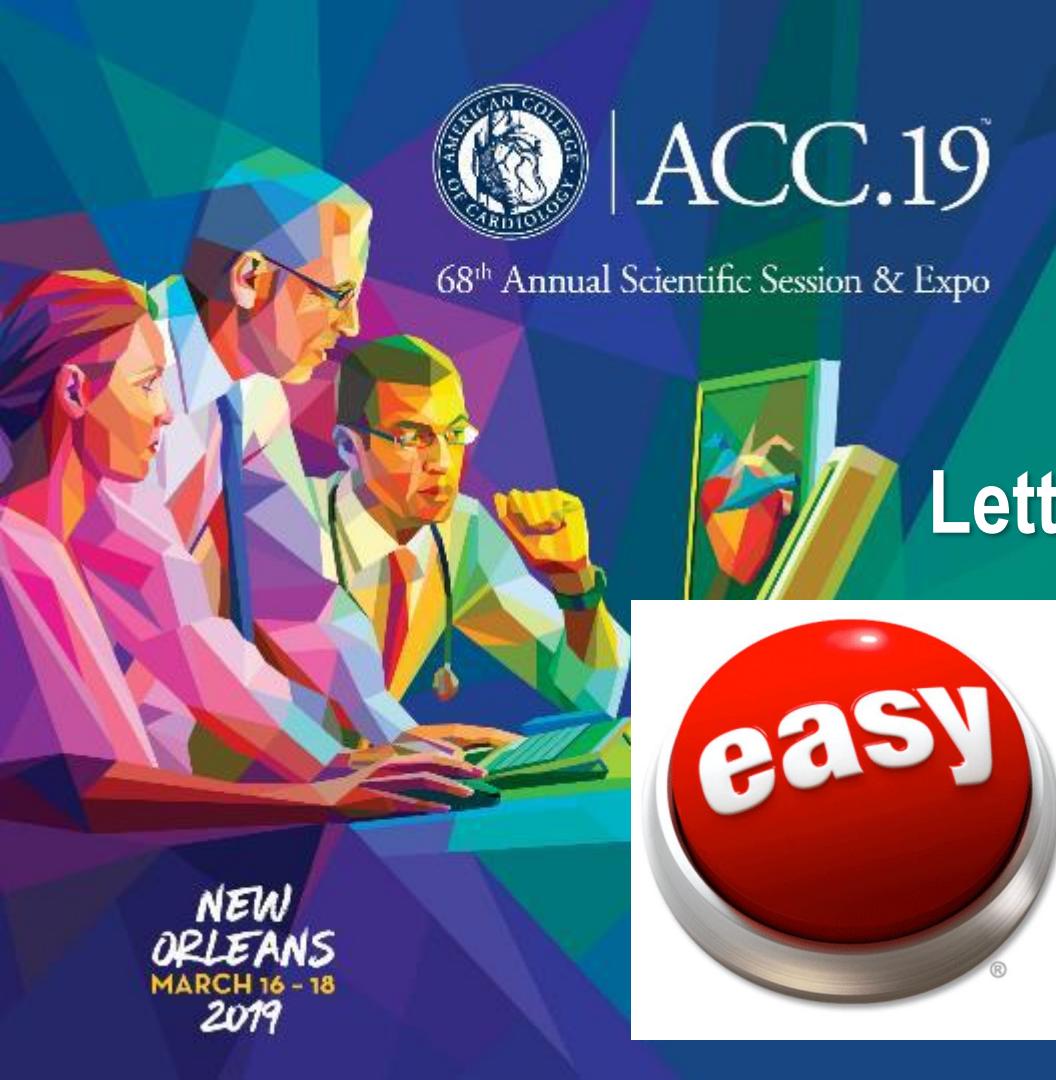
TONIGHT I traveled to a wondrous place, a fantasy land of sugarplums and fairy tales. Since some of you may never have the opportunity to visit this glorious place, let me tell you about it. It is a land where everyone "will make a fine physician," where people have "excellent interpersonal skills" and "good rapport with their peers." In this land about a tenth of the inhabitants are "among the finest I have ever worked with," a full quarter are "outstanding," and almost all are "in the upper quarter." Everyone is "a pleasure to work with," has "excellent initiative," is . . .



The NEW ENGLAND
JOURNAL of MEDICINE



ACC.19



How to Write a Good and *Honest* Letter of Recommendation For Your **BEST** Fellow

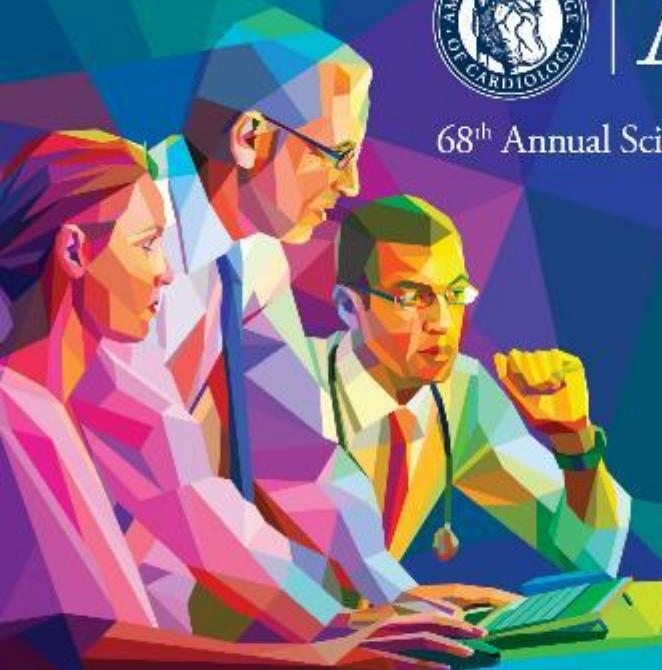


Katie Berlacher, MD MS, FACC
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
@kberlacher

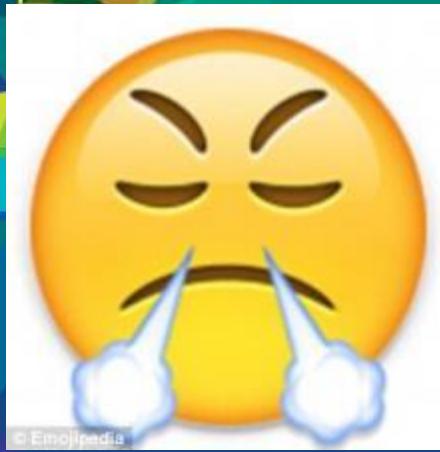


ACC.19[®]

68th Annual Scientific Session & Expo



NEW
ORLEANS
MARCH 16 - 18
2019



How to Write a Good and Honest Letter of Recommendation For Your WORST Fellow

Katie Berlacher, MD MS, FACC
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
@kberlacher

Objective

- Name 3 things that are *perceived to be important* in LOR
- List 1 phrases that are often *interpreted negatively*

Disclaimer: I really don't like writing LORs.

Disclaimer: I only find ~20% of the LORs that I read to be helpful



During Recruitment Season...



University of Pittsburgh

School of Medicine
Department of Medicine

April 18, 2018

RE: Agnes Koczo, MD

I am pleased to provide a letter of recommendation for Agnes Koczo, MD, a resident in Internal Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. Agnes has waived her right to receive a letter of recommendation from the University of Virginia Commonwealth University, where she received her BA from Wesleyan University.

Agnes received many non-clerkship awards and was unanimously selected as a well-deserved honor and was selected for further developing her clinical skills. We anticipate that she will be a valuable addition to our chief year and beyond in our residency.

In our program, Agnes has consistently received high evaluations consistently in all of her clinical rotations.

Representative comments from her fellow residents:



University of Pittsburgh

Stephen Y. Chan, M.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Medicine
University of Pittsburgh
School of Medicine

Director, Center for Nuclear Cardiology
Pittsburgh Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute
Division of Cardiology
University of Pittsburgh

UPMC Heart and Vascular Institute
HVI - Cardiology

Prem Soman, MD, PhD
FRCP (UK), FACC
Associate Professor of Medicine (Cardiology)
Associate Professor of Clinical & Translational Science

Director, Nuclear Cardiology
Director, Advanced Cardiac Imaging Fellowship

UPMC Presbyterian
200 Lothrop Street
Suite A-429
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
T 412-647-3435
F 412-647-3873
somanp@upmc.edu

May 1, 2018

Applicant Name: Agnes Koczo, MD (General Cardiology)

Dear Cardiology Fellowship Committee Members:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter of recommendation for Agnes Koczo, MD. She is highly regarded by her peers and faculty for her consideration as a general cardiology fellow in your program. She is held in the highest esteem both as a clinician and an advancing researcher. Agnes will become one of our top leaders in cardiovascular medicine and will be a valuable addition to the upcoming generation of cardiologists.

To introduce myself, I am the Director of the Center for Nuclear Cardiology and an Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Cardiology at the University of Pittsburgh. My laboratory (www.sychanlab.pitt.edu) studies the mechanisms by which various genetic and environmental factors affect the heart and blood vessels. We have a strong focus on the development of novel diagnostic and therapeutic approaches for cardiovascular diseases.



June 29, 2018

To,
The Selection Committee
Cardiology Fellowship Program

Re: Agnes Koczo

I am delighted to provide this letter of recommendation for Agnes Koczo, MD. I am writing this letter to support her application for a spot in your cardiovascular fellowship program. I have had the pleasure of working with Agnes on our inpatient cardiology service and in the nuclear cardiology laboratory. She has demonstrated exceptional clinical skills, particularly in the management of complex cardiovascular cases. She has also shown strong leadership skills, including the ability to work effectively with multidisciplinary teams. In addition, her CV is impressive, with numerous publications in high-impact journals and a strong record of research productivity. I believe that Agnes would be an asset to your program and would be a valuable addition to the upcoming generation of cardiologists.

UPMC Heart and Vascular Institute
HVI – Cardiology
at UPMC Presbyterian

Dennis M. McNamara, MD
Director

Center for Heart Failure
Research

Professor of Medicine
University of Pittsburgh
School of Medicine

Scalise Hall, Suite 566
200 Lothrop Street
Pittsburgh, PA, 15213
T 412-648-6598
F 412-648-6101

Appointments: 412-647-6000
UPMC Referrals: 800-533-8762
mcnamaradm@upmc.edu

June 27, 2018

Re: Recommendation for Agnes Koczo, MD
ERAS letter ID number: 75V86WSDD

Fellowship Selection Committee:

I would like to express my most enthusiastic recommendation for Agnes Koczo, MD. I have had an opportunity to work with her in both our CCU team and on the heart failure service. She has performed extremely well in both the clinical and research areas. She is a superb candidate for cardiology fellowship.

Dr. Koczo is a very skilled clinician who demonstrates a strong interest in heart failure patients. She has strong clinical skills and is up-to-date with relevant literature. As her attending, Agnes kept me informed of the challenging treatment decisions she felt were not supported by the literature. She does so in a very collegial manner which demonstrates her desire to also to educate. She has a very personable manner and is a pleasure to work with and her patients. Given her strong clinical skills and her desire to learn, it is no surprise that she was chosen as a chief resident for our program.

Given her interest in Women's health and cardiology, I am writing this letter of recommendation for Agnes Koczo, MD. I am writing this letter to support her application for a spot in your cardiovascular fellowship program. I have had the pleasure of working with Agnes on our inpatient cardiology service and in the nuclear cardiology laboratory. She has demonstrated exceptional clinical skills, particularly in the management of complex cardiovascular cases. She has also shown strong leadership skills, including the ability to work effectively with multidisciplinary teams. In addition, her CV is impressive, with numerous publications in high-impact journals and a strong record of research productivity. I believe that Agnes would be an asset to your program and would be a valuable addition to the upcoming generation of cardiologists.

Overall Dr. Koczo is a superb clinician who has great clinical skills and is a clinician educator. She has become an asset to our program and I would like to convince her to stay in Pittsburgh for her fellowship. I am writing this letter of recommendation for cardiology fellowship, as she is a superb candidate for our program.

Sincerely,

Standardized LOR for Residency PDs

SLOR have a specific:

- **Length:** Two pages
- **Content:**
 - Program Description
 - Competency Achievement with examples
 - Scholarly Work
 - Characteristics and skills beyond residency requirements
 - Performance related extensions, probation
 - Overall assessment of candidate's suitability

Narrative vs. Standardized LOR

	NLOR	SLOR
Variation in terminology	Significant	Less
Variation in length	Significant	Less
Inter-rater reliability	Low	High
Interpretation	Can be difficult	Easier
ACGME competencies	Variable	Always mentioned
Meaningful comparison of applicants	Can be difficult	Easier
Institution/program characteristics	Variable	Always mentioned

UPMC Heart and Vascular
Institute

February 26, 2019

Kathryn L. Berlacher, MD, MS, FACC
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Program Director
Cardiovascular Fellowship Program

Director
Magee Women's Heart Program

E355.7 Presbyterian Hospital
South Tower
200 Lothrop Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Office: 412-647-3429
Fax: 412-647-0481
berlacherk@upmc.edu

To Whom It May Concern

I write this letter in support of Dr. Brent Lampert

UPMC Heart and Vascular
Institute

Kathryn L. Berlacher, MD, MS, FACC
Assistant Professor of Medicine

Program Director
Cardiovascular Fellowship Program

Coordinator
Subspecialty Education - HIV

Scaling Hall, Suite 5-557
200 Lothrop Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Office: 412-647-3429
Fax: 412-647-0481
berlacherk@upmc.edu



Brent Lampert, DO, is a cardiovascular fellow at UPMC Heart and Vascular Institute. He began his fellowship program in July of 2014 and has been a standout since. One of his strengths is his deep fund of medical knowledge and his diligent work duties. He has outstanding communication skills and has received rave reviews from patients and the medical staff. He is a kind and compassionate doctor who always goes the extra mile to support his patients. His empathy and support are evident in all of his interactions. He has a keen interest in understanding the social determinants of health and how they impact cardiovascular disease. He has also shown a strong interest in research, particularly in the area of cardiovascular disease in women. He has successfully matriculated to the American Board of Internal Medicine's Internal Medicine Pathway, guaranteeing her protected time to further her investigative skills. He is the inaugural student on the cardiology T32 training program, which is a highly competitive program. He is currently working on his PhD in Biostatistics at the University of Pittsburgh. He has already published several papers in peer-reviewed journals and is currently working on several more. He is also involved in several clinical trials and has presented his research at numerous national and international conferences. He is a true asset to the UPMC Heart and Vascular Institute and we are lucky to have him as a part of our team.

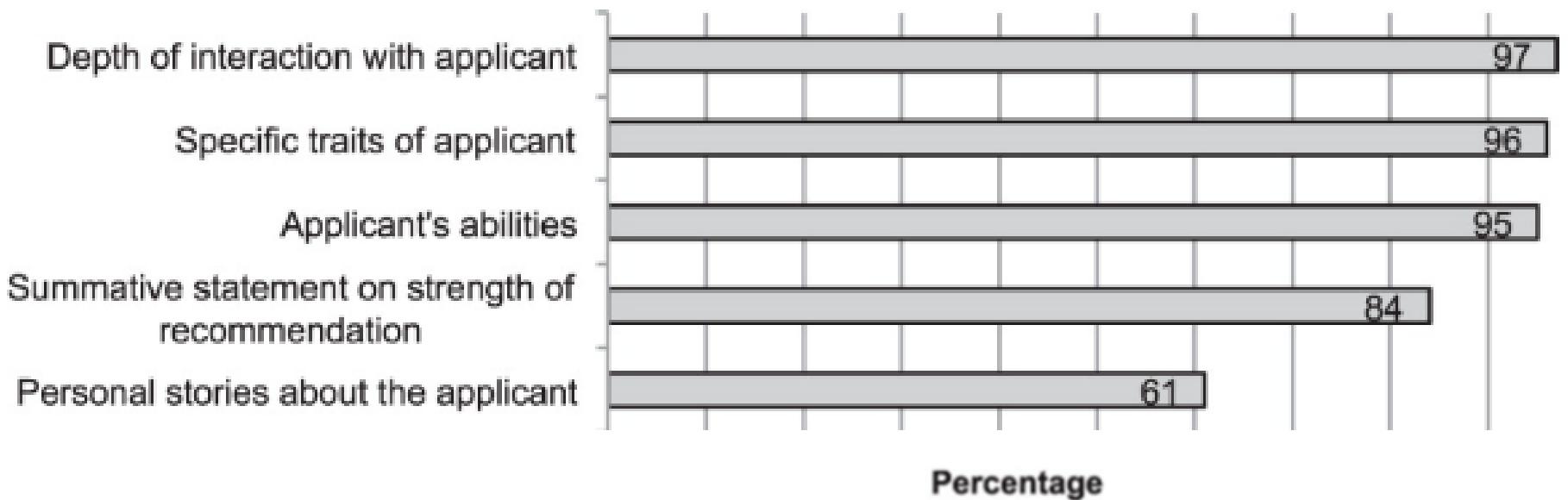
Dear Program Director: Deciphering Letters of Recommendation

Kris Saudek, MD
David Saudek, MD
Robert Treat, PhD

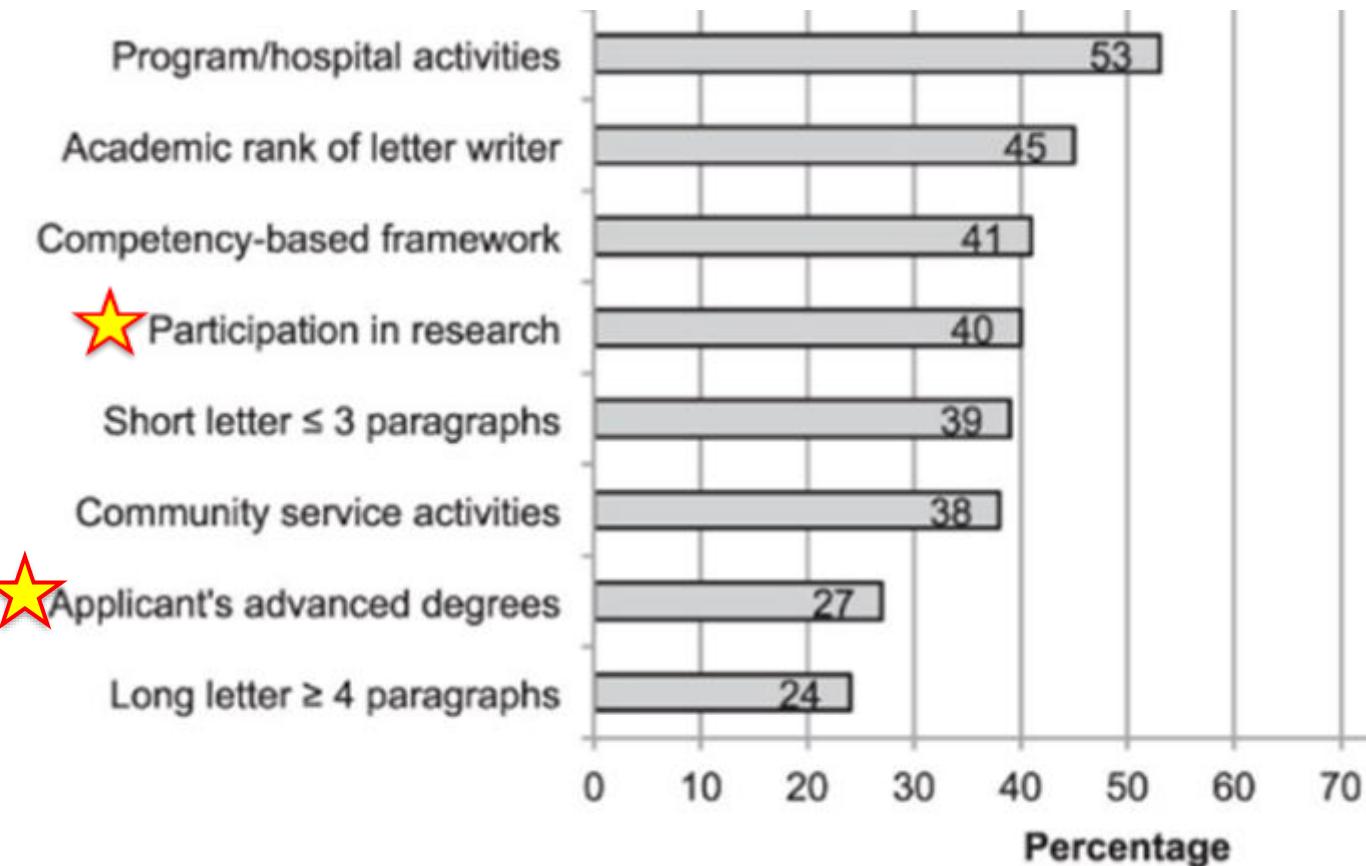
Peter Bartz, MD
Rachel Weigert, MD
Michael Weisgerber, MD, MS

- Survey of 1079 pediatric fellowship and residency PD/APDs; 43% response rate; published June 2018
- Three topics:
 - Importance of LOR features
 - Importance of applicant abilities
 - Perceptions of commonly used phrases

Letter Features – more important



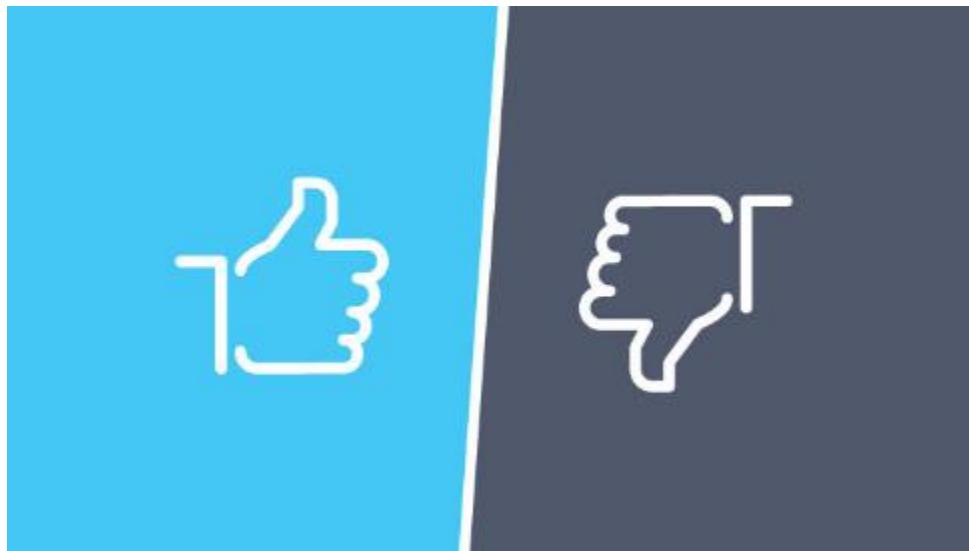
Letter Features – less important



Mixed emotions on these...

- Indicating **tier** of applicant
- Commenting on **clinical reasoning abilities**
- Commenting on **communication skills**
- LOR **writer's experience** with learners
- **Rebutability** of LOR writer

Thoughts?



Perception of Phrases



How to Write a Good LOR

- Be timely and grammatically correct
- Include your interaction with applicant
- Provide examples
- Make a summary statement

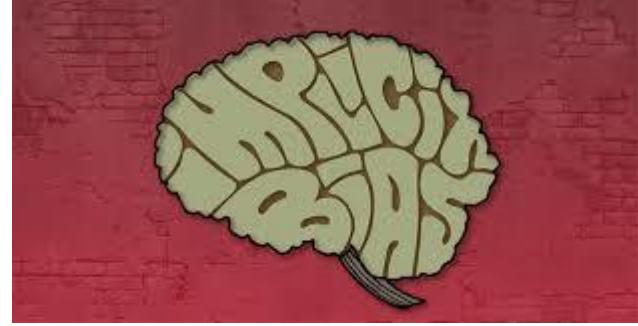


How to Write an *Honest* LOR

- Put yourself in reader's shoes – what would you want to know?
- Be factual, not emotional
- Be specific
- Include a statement about your desire to discuss applicant over a call
- Use the negatively perceived phrases (?)



Be honest about yourself...



- Implicit bias can sneak into LORs
- Most reported is gender bias
- Likely other bias creeps in
- Check your language!!
 - Research vs Teaching
 - Accomplishment vs Compassionate
 - Use of **Doubt Raisers** – ‘it appears that...’ ‘while she has not done...’

Final Tips:

- **Most important things to include in LOR:**
 - Depth of interaction
 - Character traits and abilities
 - Summative recommendation statement
 - Personal story
- **Negatively perceived statements:**
 - 'solid performance' 'showed improvement' 'performed adequately'
- **Honesty is best:**
 - State facts. Be specific. Offer to talk.
 - Check your biases and your language

