

Residency Application Guide October 11, 2022

Personal Letters



Important links & dates:

[Carms Timeline](http://www.carms.ca) www.carms.ca



[OAW CaRMS Prep](#)

[CanPrepp](http://www.canprepp.ca) www.canprepp.ca



CANADA'S PORTAL FOR RESIDENCY
PROGRAM PROMOTION
PORTAIL PROMOTIONNEL DES PROGRAMMES
DE RÉSIDENCE CANADIENS





TO DO's - OCTOBER

- ❑ MINC # - from [CPSA](#)
- ❑ [Transcript request](#) - request and upload
- ❑ Situational judgement tests
 - ❑ Casper - <https://takealtus.com/dates-times/>
 - ❑ FMProC - <https://fmproc.com/>



What is a Personal Letter?

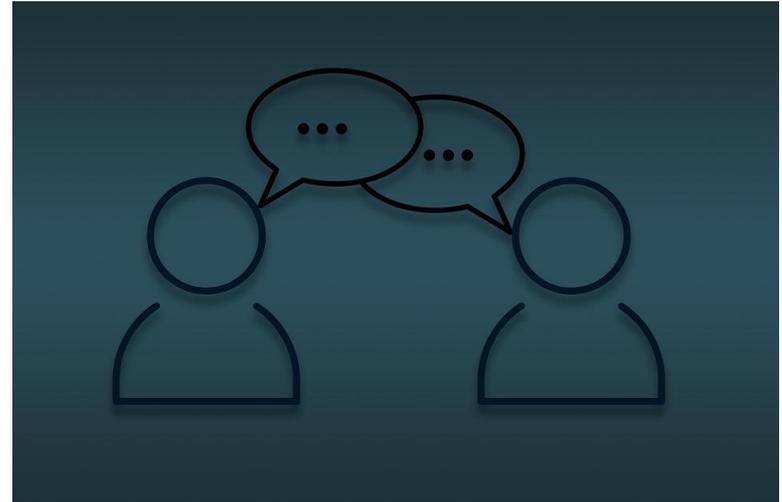
- an opportunity to let people get to know you, how you are unique, why you are interested in a program and career path
- NOT a description of your accomplishments

Why is it important?

- A good letter may get you an interview and can help reinforce the impression you make during the interview
- On the other hand, a bad letter could ruin your chances



What are things that would make you want to talk with someone?





It is important to know yourself!





Activity- Think about the following questions:

A. What are you passionate about in life and how does this relate to your work?

C. Identify 3 skills you possess that demonstrate that you are well-suited for this specialty.

E. What are your long-term personal and career goals?

B. Why did you choose this specialty?

D. Describe 3 experiences that have prepared you for this specialty.

F. What qualities do you look for in a residency program?



Writing a Personal Letter

- Programs are very particular about their personal letters. Look on the CaRMS website for the specific requirements for each program to ensure that:
 - You answer all the questions
 - You respect the word count limit

Example: UBC - FM

Personal Letter

Provide a biographical letter (max. 750 words) that includes answers to the following questions:

1. *Why do you want to choose Family Medicine as a career? What makes you a good fit for this career choice?*
2. *What life skills or experience do you have that demonstrate your suitability for family medicine residency training?*
3. *Why UBC? Why British Columbia? Elaborate on any connections you might have with the province of B.C.*
4. *What clinical experience have you had in Canada?*
5. *What experience do you have in community-based family medicine?*

Writing a Personal Letter

- ❑ Programs are very particular about their personal letters. Look on the CaRMS website for the specific requirements for each program to ensure that:

Example: U of A FM

"OTHER" Instead of a traditional personal letter please answer the following TWO questions. Your answers will be used to evaluate your interest and suitability for Family Medicine as well as any connection to our community and any areas of concern.

1) Please highlight three things about yourself that you would like to ensure we do not miss in our review. Items may include special skills or accomplishments, your connection to Edmonton or anything else you feel will strengthen your application to UofA Family Medicine. Maximum 50 words per item (i.e. 150 words total). Please do not exceed the maximum word count.

2) Sometimes applicants are worried about certain items in their application. Please use this space to explain any concerns you may have. For example, academic performance, professionalism concerns, fam med experience or other. Maximum 100 words. If you have no concerns then simply write n/a.



Structure

**Paragraph 1-
Introduction:
The “Hook”**

- 1) Captivate the reader’s attention with a personal story or vignette
- 2) Demonstrate your passion for the field

**Paragraph 2:
Why medicine & Why the
specialty?**

- Provide examples that illustrate the following:
- 1) Your motivation - emphasize personal and clinical reasons
 - 2) Your interest for the specialty: patient diversity, scope of practice, etc.

**Paragraph 3:
Why YOU for this
specialty?**

- 1) Discuss your character traits, experiences, contributions and personal strengths
- 2) Look at the qualities identified in each program description and find relevant examples

**Paragraph 4:
Career Goals**

- 1) General overview of your future goals (research, teaching, mentorship)
- 2) Avoid being too specific about practice and subspecialty

**Paragraph 5:
Why the program?**

- 1) Discuss your elective experience, what you enjoy about the program
- 2) Why the city: Mention your support system, connection to the community

**Paragraph 6:
Conclusion**

- 1) Summarize your strengths
- 2) Restate your enthusiasm for pursuing this residency program



Paragraph 1: Introduction – Passionate "hook"

- ❑ Your introduction serves two purposes:
 - 1) Captivate the attention of your reader
 - 2) Demonstrate your passion for the field

- ❑ **Avoid: Giving a chronological explanation detailing how you came to your decision to choose that specialty**



Example of a good hook:

Internal Med: University of Alberta (300 words per answer): If you can only do one of the following in medicine, which would you choose - teacher, researcher, administrator, inpatient care, or outpatient care? Why?

"My preceptor and I run to the Emergency Department to see Mrs. B, a patient with known alcohol use disorder presenting with a massive gastrointestinal bleed. Seamlessly, the nurses, doctors and technicians assume their roles to arrange an urgent endoscopy. I offer Mrs. B my hand, and the fear in her eyes eases before she is sedated and intubated. There is uncertainty as we search for the bleed, and elation as we successfully cauterise the vessel. Moments like these, where human connection, teamwork and skilled intervention work in orchestra to treat disease, draw me to inpatient care." (Abby Rentz 2022)



Another great hook:

PEDS: Personal letter should be no longer than 750 words.

We are looking for an honest, original and thoughtfully written letter. Do not be afraid to write in a frank manner about your past experience. Your personal letter should discuss the following topic: Tell us about something, outside of medicine, that you have taught yourself in the last 4 years. How did you go about teaching yourself this new skill or idea, and what was the result?

"As a black woman, I have a complex and complicated relationship with my hair. Teaching myself the art of Black hair braiding has fostered attention to detail, patience, and creativity in me." (AA, 2022)



Paragraph 2: Why medicine & Why the specialty?

- ❑ Important characteristics to emphasize in this paragraph are:
 - 1) Your motivation: Personal reasons (illness of a family member, wanting to help people, etc.) and Clinical reasons (prevention, patient advocacy, etc.)
 - 2) Your interest for the specialty: Patient diversity, flexibility with the scope of practice, patient- physician relationship, etc.

- ❑ Avoid: Unconvincing general statements such as: “I like to treat patients“. Provide specific, analytic points to explain your suitability for the program.



Paragraph 3: Why you for this speciality?

- ❑ Your character traits, your experiences, your contributions and your personal strengths.
 - Character traits / Personal strengths: “Preceptors have commented on...”
 - Experiences: “An incident from my Family Medicine rotation is an example of...”
 - Contributions: “As my medical student performance record shows...”
- ❑ Look at the qualities identified in each program description and find relevant examples to tailor your application to the individual programs.

Tip!: Look at your evaluations to help you identify attributes and strengths and/or refer to the CanMEDS roles for inspiration.
- ❑ **Avoid: Enumerating the facts listed on your CV and in your MSPR. Rather, use the experiences you gained while doing these activities to expand on the facts they already know and to provide concrete examples to support your claims.**



Paragraph 4: Career Goals

“ Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years? “

- How will you contribute to the field of medicine through?:
 - Research
 - Teaching
 - Mentorship
 - Advocacy

- Describe your vision of your future practice and what you hope to accomplish:
 - Setting: hospital-based, community-based, or both
 - Location: remote, inner-city, international, etc.
 - Population: underserviced populations, children, palliative care, etc.
 - Subspecialties, etc.

- Avoid: Being too narrow in your description of your future goals (subspecialty, location, etc.). Programs are looking for candidates who are open-minded, and who understand the nature of the ever changing field of medicine.

- Be authentic



Paragraph 5: Why the program/institution

1) Why the program

- Do your research and find out specific points about the program and why you are interested to train there. Vary the technical reasons with the personal characteristics of the work environment (ie: collaborative team).

2) Why the city

- Explain what you enjoy about the city (culture, art, museums, sports, etc.) and discuss your family, friends and strong support system who are present (if genuine).
 - If you have never visited that city, identify reasons why you would be happy to pursue residency training in that location (link to your hobbies, activities).
- Avoid: 1) Giving general statements about the program that can be applied to other programs; 2) Placing too much emphasis on the location and not enough on the program itself.**



Paragraph 6: Conclusion

- The conclusion allows you to **create a link to your introduction**
 - 1) Summarize your strengths: Reiterate the evidence you have laid out throughout the letter to explain why you are the right person for the program.
 - 2) Restate your enthusiasm: Leave your reader with a clear indication of your passion for the program and specialty.

- Avoid: Diluting the impact of your letter by ending it on a bland note or using general statements and clichés.



Example of a strong conclusion (from Peds hook)

“I've come to understand that often the skill is not only about the knowledge and the expertise that it requires, but also the perspective with which I approach it. It has taught me the importance of self-reflection, of persistence, and resourcefulness to conquer a problem. I realize that while my problems have the capacity to shift and evolve, so do I. This means that failure at the outset, does not mean failure forever. I continue to remind myself of this when I get discouraged in learning a new skill or fail to progress as I hope.” (AA, 2022)



Common Mistakes

Writing

- ❑ Overuse of 'I' statements
- ❑ Using abbreviations or contractions (ex: 'don't' instead of 'do not')
- ❑ Using pretentious words or jargon (ex: 'amazing team')
- ❑ Using too many quotations or clichés
- ❑ Poor grammar and spelling errors (ask friends and family to proof read)
- ❑ Using negative statements (ex: stating what you do not like about other specialties)
- ❑ Avoid being too creative with your writing style (your letter should demonstrate your ability to communicate with your patients and colleagues)



Common Mistakes

Structure

- ❑ Lack of flow or purpose to a paragraph [Transition words/phrases](#)
- ❑ Not being concise (paragraphs that are too long)
- ❑ Using repetitive words and/or sentence structure



Common Mistakes

Content

- ❑ Repeating the facts on your CV
- ❑ Exaggerating, making excuses or seeming arrogant
- ❑ Not providing examples to back up the points you are making (ex: descriptions of your character traits)
- ❑ Too much focus on specific career plans or future fellowships (too narrow of a description)
- ❑ Giving a long chronological explanation detailing how you came to your decision to choose that specialty



TIP:

Have your letter read by at least 1 expert!

- OAW/MedMAP mentor
- a resident/or doc from the speciality you are applying to

Also consider asking friend/family member - as they know you well, to see if you captured your personal strengths.

Make sure you give yourself enough time to write the letters - do not procrastinate



FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions!

- ❑ What is the length of the letter?

Each program has different word limit requirements, it often varies from 400 words to 1000 words. Take a look on the CaRMS website to tailor your letter to each program requirement.

- ❑ How many versions of my Personal Letter should I create?

You should have one “long version“ of your letter for each specialty you are applying to (i.e. family medicine and ob/gyn: have one “long version“ for each). Then tailor each letter based on the program requirements.

- Remember to modify “ Paragraph 5: Why the program/institution“ for each application.
- Look on the CaRMS website for specific letter requirements for each program.



Reach out for support...





References

- McGill's Undergraduate Career Planning Office:
<http://www.mcgill.ca/medcareerplan/4-matching/residency-application-documents/personal-letters>