

REFERENCE LETTERS

A student has approached to ask if you will write a letter of reference on their behalf.

NOW WHAT?

WHY are they asking me?

- A frequent request is a reference letter related to the CaRMS process, however there are other occasions where letters of reference are required by learners (scholarships, awards).
- [CaRMS](#) = Canadian Resident Matching Service is a national, independent, non-for-profit matching, fee-for-service organization that provides a fair, objective and transparent application and matching service for medical training throughout Canada

WHO is this person (*what do I really know about them as a medical student*)?

- Identify, describe and provide examples of encounters and observations of the medical student and when possible, as they relate to the applicable framework objectives ([CanMEDS Framework](#)).
- Say what you mean. Colorful wordage, lengthy paragraphs are not required. Informative, authentic feedback about the medical student is all that is required.
- **Note:** If approached and you feel will be a challenge for you or you will struggle to meet the deadline or you are not able to provide a positive or comprehensive letter of reference (i.e. due to lack of or less than positive encounters with the learner), it is suggested you communicate this to the learner immediately so they can consider approaching another referee.

WHAT should I write?

- Identify yourself as the referee, who you are, where you are located, describe your professional environment, number of medical students you encounter and how you are connected to the medical student. You must include a statement of confidentiality confirming you have not shared the reference letter with the student.
- Inform reviewers how you have interacted with this student and for what duration of time.
- Include anything that is exceptional that the medical student has done or has been observed doing (i.e., a family who describes a positive encounter with the student). Outlining improvements/significant growth noted during your time together can be relevant.
- If applicable incorporate areas where the student is not performing as expected in a measured, honest.
- Provide a concluding summary as well as your recommendation for the medical student and where possible rank the student as compared to other medical learners you have encountered.
- There is no correct /incorrect length of the reference letter. Have a colleague review the letter you have drafted for any constructive feedback before submitting.
- NOTE: many programs are using a structured letter format for the R1 2026 CaRMS match, narrative letters will not be accepted for these programs. [What is a structured reference letter? – Canadian Resident Matching Service \(zendesk.com\)](#)
- The format of required reference letters per Program can be found within each Program Description: [Program Descriptions - CaRMS](#).

WHERE do I send the letter and how?

- Letters must be submitted electronically to [CaRMS online](#)
- [How do referees send in reference documents? – Canadian Resident Matching Service \(zendesk.com\)](#)
- Letters are not to be sent directly to students or shared with them in any way.

WHEN is the letter due to be submitted?

- Be aware of the letter submission due date you have been asked about [R-1 Main Residency Match \(First Iteration\) – Applicant Timeline - CaRMS](#)
- The R1 2026 Match portal opened **September 10, 2025**
- Translation deadline for Reference letters for R1 Match is **Oct 6, 2025**
- All CaRMS Reference letters for the R1 Match are due online in the CaRMS portal **Nov 26, 2025, 21:00EST**
- Students may ask for a reference letter well in advance of the deadline. They are advised to send email reminder(s) to Referees through the Fall 2025
- Late reference letter submissions are **NOT** accepted. If you know you are not able to meet the stated deadline, inform the student immediately.

Resources:

- [Document types - CaRMS](#)
- [Canadian Resident Matching Service \(zendesk.com\)](#)

For further guidance or questions please contact: Dr. Dan Smyth: dsmyth@dal.ca

Updated September 2025