

The Anatomy of a Letters to Medical School Admission: How to update medical schools, express continued interest, and write a letter of intent

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Objectives: After reading this article, medical school applicants will be able to confidently author letters to medical school admissions committees and describe the three most common types of communications and their purposes.

Article:

It's the fall and you've worked hard to make yourself the best medical school applicant. Applications are submitted. Secondaries are completed. Now what? The period between application submission and when medical school contact you can be a time of great stress. For the past several years you have been working towards accomplishing your goal of being accepted to medical school and now you must avoid a common trap!

Your work is not done once you have submitted your application. In fact, the interview season is when most successful applicants are the most active in their communications with admissions offices. Consider that each medical school receives thousands of applications per year. No matter how unique your application may be, at the end of the day, it is still on paper and looks exactly like all of the others. This is your opportunity to change that.

There are three types of letters commonly sent to medical school admissions offices: (1) Update Letter, (2) Letter of Continued Interest, and (3) Letter of Intent. Each of these letters is an explicit effort on your part to communicate your interest in a medical school with the goal of increasing the chances that your application is switched from the "Do Not Interview" stack to the "Interview" stack – or even from the "Waitlist" pile to the "Accepted" pile.

1. Update Letter.

What is the purpose? The purpose of an application update letter is to say to a medical school, "Hi! I applied to XXX medical school and I am such an awesome applicant that I am still continuing all of these awesome projects/research/extracurriculars that I included in my application."

When to write? This letter should be sent to medical schools about 6-10 weeks after you submitted your application to their office and if you have not yet heard back from them.

Who do I send this to? This letter can be sent to every school you have applied to and have not heard back from.

Anatomy of an Update Letter:

Dear [Dr. Dean of Admissions]:

Paragraph 1. My name is [Awesome Applicant], AAMC ID 12345678, and I am writing to provide an additional update to my medical school application for the Fall of 2018.

- *Keep this first line simple and to the point. Let them know exactly why you are contacting them*

Paragraph 2. I would like to update the status of [current research, extracurricular projects, presentations].

- *Keep this section to 3-5 sentences and provide concise details summarizing what has changed between when you submitted your application and now. No fluff, only concrete updates, i.e. XYZ paper has been accepted, I was elected to this leadership position, etc.*

Paragraph 3. Use this section to provide further updates that can be listed as bullet points that are *not included in paragraph 2*. In this section you can list new committees or programs you are involved in, list updates to any publications you have, or abstracts and presentations.

Respectfully,

[Awesome Applicant]
M.D. Applicant
AMCAS ID 12345678

2. Letter of Continued Interest

What is the purpose? The purpose of a letter of continued interest is to communicate to a medical school that you are interested in them and that they are a perfect fit for you. This is a heartfelt and sincere letter that focuses on exactly why this school is a perfect fit.

When to write? Letters of continued interest are most commonly sent to medical schools after update letters have been sent and you have still not heard from a particular medical school. This time period is usually in the late winter: mid-January to February. This is when schools have already sifted and sorted most applications and when a personal, sincere letter stating why this school is the perfect fit for you may have the most impact if your application is on the bubble.

Who do I send this to? Unlike update letters, letters of continued interest require you to really take some time to think about why a particular school is a great fit for you. This does take some time and so these letters should only be sent to the schools that you think would honestly be a great fit for you. An insincere letter is a great way to be end up in the denied pile.

Anatomy of a Letter of Continued Interest:

Dear [Dr. Dean of Admissions],

Paragraph 1. My name is [Awesome Applicant], AAMC 12345678, and I would like to express my continued interest in [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name].

Paragraph 2. Take 1-2 sentences summarizing what efforts you have previously taken to reach out to the school. This can include previous update letters or that you have requested an updated transcript be sent, etc.

Paragraph 3. Share the exact reasons why this medical school is a great fit. Find 4-5 concrete and meaningful reasons. What about the school attracts you to it? Is it the location, reputation for research/service/primary care, opportunity to pursue dual degrees, learning environment, philosophy towards medical education, etc. This is the meat-and-potatoes of your letter and where you can really have an impact.

Respectfully,

[Awesome Applicant]
M.D. Applicant
AMCAS ID 12345678

3. Letter of Intent

What is the purpose? Finally, you are here! It is the end of interview season and you have decided that XYZ medical school is the perfect school for you. Now tell them! This letter is short and sweet and tells a medical school admissions committee that when they accept you, that you will come there.

When to write? Write this letter after you have finished or are nearing the end of the interview season and have found the school that you want to go to. If that happens in January? Perfect. If that doesn't happen until the end of February? Perfect. No matter the time, this is your opportunity to tell a school that you are committing to them.

Who do I send this to? Send this to your number one school. The world of Medical school admissions is small and sending multiple letters of intent is a gamble not worth taking.

Anatomy of a Letter of Intent:

Dear [Dr. Dean of Admissions],

Paragraph 1. My name is [Awesome Applicant], AAMC 12345678, and I interviewed at [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name] on [Date of interview]. I am writing to express my intent to attend [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name] if accepted and explain why [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name] is an excellent fit for me.

Paragraph 2. If accepted, I will attend [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name]. I believe that [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name] is an excellent fit for me for several reasons.

- *Unlike your letter of continued interest, your letter of intent is sent after your interview, therefore, you will have much more information about the program and have a much better feel for the school – this paragraph is your opportunity to share with the admissions committee why it is the perfect fit.*

Paragraph 3. If accepted to [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name], I will attend. I believe that [Dr. Dean of Admissions Medical School Name] is an excellent institution and I would be honored to have the opportunity to complete my medical education there. Thank you for your consideration of my application.

Respectfully,

[Awesome Applicant]

M.D. Applicant

AMCAS ID 12345678

Conclusion: Remember! Interview season is when you should be the most active in your communication with medical schools. Be proactive and engage them. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Your letters and active communication can make all of the difference!