

Letter of Recommendation - Dissected

Dear Admissions Committee:

It is with absolute enthusiasm that I write this letter recommending XXXX for a position in your pediatric dental residency program. I have known XXXX for almost 3 years and she has proven to be one of the most exceptional dental students that I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with.

As a researcher at the UCSF's Center XXXX, I'm well aware of the dental needs of our pediatric population especially those from disadvantaged families and underserved communities. It highlights the importance of prevention and early intervention strategies from both the public and private sectors – including the need for more pediatric dental providers dedicated to serving the vulnerable. And as a faculty member within the Division of XXX at UCSF School of Dentistry, I engage with dental students regularly through various community-based activities either through course curricula or extracurricular outreach events such as health fairs. Through these interactions, I have met students that show a genuine interest in public health dentistry and with some guidance and mentoring might even consider making a career of it. However, every once in a while a student comes along who already has a deep-seated passion to serve the underserved, a vision and plan to go out and make a difference in the community, and actually deliver and execute that plan. XXXX is this rare find.

XXXX is the type of individual that sets high goals and expectations for herself and follows through on achieving them. She is all about action, a do-er, and a natural leader. This was made clear to me **when she stepped up to be one of the class coordinators for my XXXX course taught to 2nd year dental students.** As a leader, **she was responsible for planning and organizing XXXX. She managed over 40 of her classmates to implement various components including XXXX.** I was impressed with **how well she organized and executed the event, and her leadership in delegating and drawing respect and support from her fellow classmates.** However, seeing her in direct interaction with the children was most gratifying. **She had this lively yet nurturing and supportive presence that seemed to engage the children effectively** – a quality that will serve her well when caring for her pediatric patients.

This is but one example from her extraordinary track record in both research and outreach activities over the years. One look at her CV and it is apparent that this level of dedication and drive runs deep – a necessity to be able to undertake her current community-based XXXX program. **XXXX has single-handedly created this project after assessing the great need for better oral health for preschool aged children in select San Francisco communities,** without the help of any grants or financial support.

She developed and implemented: **an educational curriculum** for the children; **training for the school staff and teachers;** **an in-class toothbrushing protocol;** and **a follow-up plan of the schools at 1, 3, 6, 9, 12 months to ensure maintenance.** What started at one school has now grown to 20 preschools serving over 600 children. Adherence by the teachers and children has been surprisingly high and the project has been very well-received. **In response to requests from other schools to expand her outreach, XXXX has inspired and trained 10 other dental students to join her efforts.** She has succeeded to do what would take over a year for most public health programs to institute, on no funding and in less than six months. This is impressive. And she was nationally recognized for this with the American Public Health Association's Jong Pre-professional award last Fall.

Through this and her many other activities, I can say that XXXX has blended a number of essential skills and attributes that I believe would help in her development into an outstanding community-oriented pediatric dentist. She has a deep commitment to reduce the oral health and oral health care disparities in our communities, she has an innovative mind to consider meaningful and practical solutions, she has a proven record of collaborating with multiple partners, she has the academic knowledge and rigor to implement a meaningful approach, and she can bring a project to fruition. Perhaps most importantly, **she accomplishes all of this with a sense of humility and authenticity.** XXXX is also very mature, personable, and a delight to be around.

I wholeheartedly support XXXX for a position in your post-graduate residency program in pediatric dentistry. She has what it takes to achieve greatness in whatever she pursues and I'm delighted she has chosen pediatric dentistry with a focus on public health – an area where so many of our oral health disparities abound and need the passion and hard work of people like XXXX. If accepted into your program, I assure you that your program, our profession, and most importantly the children and communities she serves will be impacted in a most positive way.

Strong letters of recommendation share three specific qualities.

1. They qualify the writer by describing how the writer knows the applicant in terms of length and depth of association.
2. They are evidence based and provide specific examples of the applicant's strengths through detailed examples of the work the writer witnessed.
3. The writer has a valid internal framework for their recommendation (e.g. the writer is clear on the difference between writing "I recommend" vs. "It is with great pleasure that I recommend...". One approach is indifferent in tone, while the other is enthusiastic.)

ADEA provides letter writers guidelines on the elements of a strong letter of recommendation. These include examples of:

- Critical thinking
- Clinical skills
- Didactic knowledge
- Integrity
- Interpersonal skills
- Maturity
- Organizational skills
- Professional demeanor
- Reaction to criticism
- Self-awareness

Application services sometimes specify a character limit for letter writers, (e.g. PASS has a 3600 limit), but generally strong letters are about a page long.

Specific important qualities may be sought after by different specialties, so the letter writer is advised to speak to these to create a strong letter.