

# College of Medicine

# MD Student

# Personal Letter Guide

*The Office of Career Advising and Mentorship (OCA&M) plays an important role in preparing students for the residency match process. When medical students start applying to the Canadian Resident Matching Service (CaRMS) to begin the application process, they need to create several personal letters. Your personal letter discusses the reasons why you have chosen a particular training program. Each program has preferences regarding what the personal letter should contain. Check the individual program descriptions at [carms.ca](http://carms.ca).*

## Content

- Create a tailored personal letter for each program you apply to
- Your personal letter should emphasize your competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities), talents, experience and accomplishments that make you the ideal candidate for that particular position
- Use variety in your sentence structure and use transition/linking words, to connect one idea to the next
- Review your personal letter for spelling and grammatical errors and consider having someone at the Office of Career Advising and Mentorship (OCAM) review your residency application documents; book in for a CaRMS document review appointment

## Organization/Layout

- Keep your personal letter to 1–1½ pages and single spaced
- Your letter should include an introductory paragraph, two main body paragraphs and a closing paragraph
- Address your personal letter to “Dr. [Program Director] and members of the Selection Committee”

## Format/Design

- If you are having trouble keeping your personal letter to 1–1½ pages, consider using narrower margins or choosing smaller line spacing
- Use a common font style (Calibri, Times New Roman, 11 or 12 point size), throughout your document, ensuring that font style chosen matches your CV

## Social Media

- Review all of your social media accounts and privacy settings
- Consider creating a LinkedIn profile which allows you to upload your CV content and connect with medical professionals locally and around the world
- For tips on how to build a professional student LinkedIn profile check out the Leverage LinkedIn at [students.usask.ca/articles/linkedin.php](http://students.usask.ca/articles/linkedin.php)

# Checklist



## Know Yourself and Your Audience

- Can you comfortably articulate your values, knowledge, skills, abilities and interests as they relate to residency application documents?
- Did you perform an adequate amount of research on the prospective program? For example: Talking to current/former residents, reviewing program descriptions on CaRMS website, reviewing program's website

## Production and Format

- Is your personal letter limited to 1–1½ pages?
- Did you grab the reader's attention by explaining why their program or specialty appeals to you in the first paragraph? Consider telling personal or academic or clinical experiences.
- In the second paragraph, did you communicate your strengths and competencies as they relate to the specialty and program?
- In the final paragraph, did you discuss unique elements of this particular program that appeal to you?
- Have you reviewed your document for spelling and grammar errors?
- Were you concise and to the point in your personal letter?
- Have you had a friend, family member or mentor review the document for spelling/grammar errors and content?
- Did you create an original letter for each program rather than sending a mass produced copy?
- Have you double-checked that the personal letter uploaded to each program has been assigned to the correct one?

## Next Steps

- Revisit your applications several times within the [carms.ca](http://carms.ca) platform to ensure your submissions are complete.
- Have you booked an appointment with the Office of Career Advising and Mentorship (OCA&M) to review your documents?

Resource: CaRMS program descriptions are publicly available at [carms.ca](http://carms.ca).

## Family Medicine sample

Dear Dr. Program Director and members of the Selection Committee,

A family physician has the privilege of getting to know patients of all ages, over a long period of time, not only in terms of their whole body, but as part of their personal history, family, community, and society. The aspects of holism and the continuity of care involved in Family Medicine, as well as the fit with my experiences and personality, are what lead me to a passion for general practice. Family medicine has been my specialty of choice since before medical school. I became involved with Saskatoon's student-run clinic, Student Wellness Initiative Toward Community Health (SWITCH), and other social justice educational initiatives prior to being admitted to medicine. I became passionate about societal health, and first consciously experienced the power of hearing people's stories.

While I am pursuing a residency position in Saskatchewan, I am first and foremost interested in the Regina site as it combines the benefits of a smaller program with the resources of a larger centre. Regina residents spend time with hospitalists and admit the Family Medicine Unit's patients to learn inpatient management, have a reputedly busy obstetrics rotation, and spend time at Four Directions Health Centre. On my internal medicine sub-specialty selective rotations and Clinical Teaching Unit elective in Regina, I really enjoyed the friendly, supportive and hands-on nature of the Regina site.

I was inspired to pursue a career in medicine because of the unique setting physicians build relationships with their patients in. I look forward to learning to deal with the specific challenges of family medicine's complexity, such as balancing multiple concerns while addressing pressing issues and maintaining appropriate boundaries while fostering fulfilling relationships. While I have also considered a career in psychiatry, as my elective selections would indicate, my interest in the discipline are best served through a career in family medicine.

In addition to its holism, the flexibility and portability of family medicine excite me. My educational experiences have shown me the appeal of rural, remote/northern, and urban inner city opportunities. My goal is to develop the skill set to practice full-service family medicine which includes inpatient management, emergency medicine, care of the elderly, minor procedures, obstetrics, and possibly some addictions medicine.

The diversity of family medicine encompasses my various special interests in inner city health, Indigenous Health, global health, and geriatrics. My appreciation for societal health was fostered through my extensive involvement as a shift supervisor and board member (among other roles) at Saskatoon's student-run clinic, SWITCH. SWITCH taught me about humanity's dignity, strength, and oppression. The insights I gained in this setting motivated me to work collaboratively to face poverty, societal barriers to health and addictions, and

to promote Indigenous Health and organizational growth. My two-month externship in La Ronge after second year Medicine reinforced those interests and my passion for family medicine. I experienced them in an exciting northern, remote, team-based, and hands-on setting.

For clerkship, I chose to be a part of the small clerkship program in Prince Albert. Working with generalist specialists and full-service family doctors, I experienced the advantages of one-on-one, self-directed and very hands-on learning in Saskatchewan's "gateway to the North." This has taught me adaptability, independence, and how to take advantage of learning opportunities while recognizing my limitations and finding support.

Besides my relevant experience and ties to Saskatchewan, I offer desirable qualities in both a future resident and family doctor. I am thorough, organized, and detail-oriented; I take extensive notes, ask lots of questions, and have been involved with various committees and conference planning. My personality is such that I am contemplative and engage in continuous reflection on the details to find their overall significance demonstrated by my devoted involvement in SWITCH and various committees which also helped to refine my communication skills. Being open to listening to patients and colleagues is one of the most important qualities a physician can embody and is very important to me.

Through experience, I intend to improve my clinical confidence, comfort level with conflict, and assertiveness. I strive for balance and self-awareness through my ready sense of humour and activities such as yoga, running, baking, cooking, reading, and singing. I recognize the importance of my social support from my family, friends, partner, and a strong peer group.

I am confident that family medicine will help me to fulfill my career and life aspirations. My passion, personality and experiences make me a strong candidate for the Regina-based family medicine residency program.

Thank you for your consideration.



Sincerely,  
Candace Clerk

## Psychiatry sample

Dear Dr. Program Director and members of the Selection Committee:

A psychiatrist has the privilege of knowing a patient's fundamental experiences and thoughts and integrates this information with her to actually think differently and experience improved mental health. I am passionate about psychiatry as it fits my interests, experiences, and personality well. Your program appeals to me particularly due to its small size and its multifaceted training. The small size allows for hands-on work with patients while being supported academically in an excellent preceptor to resident ratio. I appreciate that the program combines experiences in the Emergency Department, various psychotherapy modalities, inpatient psychiatry and community psychiatry (both general and in various subspecialties), including the chance to work with underserved populations, such as at Westside Community Clinic, the Calder Centre, the Regional Psychiatric Centre and visiting rural/northern clinics.

Growing up in rural Saskatchewan, I saw how stigmatization of mental health issues and a lack of community resources really hurt people. I chose to pursue medicine as a career because of the unique ways that a physician, specifically a psychiatrist, can impact the lives of communities. I love the holism and complexity of psychiatry and I look forward to learning to deal with the specific challenges of its complexity, such as working with local resources to support patients psychosocially and maintaining appropriate boundaries while fostering fulfilling relationships.

During my undergraduate experience and time in medical school, I was heavily involved in SWITCH, Saskatoon's student-run inner city clinic, as a social and medical volunteer then board chair, among other roles. Seeing the relationship between clients' mental health challenges and social circumstances really affected me. I have been privileged with the chance to listen to clients' stories and to see the positive impact of social supports, counseling and occasionally psychiatric medications on clients' situations. SWITCH has also helped me see the world through the lens of the social determinants of health. My Dean's Summer Research Project, after first year medical school, focused on community service-learning with underserved populations. Mental health remains a challenge in Western society, and I would love to dedicate my life to advancing it. While my work history is certainly not extensive, working at a law office in university summers with will/estate, criminal and family law clients showed me how societal structures and the people who work within them can impact mental health.

My clerkship rotations and electives bolstered my interest in psychiatry, while my electives in family medicine helped me to understand the patient as a whole person. On my core psychiatric rotation, I enjoyed a well-rounded psychiatry practice by working with community psychiatrists to see the patients they've known for years, plus inpatient

psychiatry for the most acutely ill and consults in the Emergency Department for those in crisis. I enjoyed the challenge of quickly establishing rapport and navigating community resources to best work with a patient.

On my elective rotation in addictions medicine in downtown eastside Vancouver, I witnessed the pathophysiology of addiction and how a patient's often difficult background fits into that. As a psychiatrist, I think I would enjoy the challenge of having a satellite clinic in the inner city with a similar population. I also spent elective time with some geriatric psychiatrists in Calgary, where I enjoyed hearing seniors' stories and participating in interdisciplinary assessments to optimize seniors' quality of life. With Canada's aging population, teams like these are also crucial for societal health. My core and elective clerkship rotations showed me the importance of various domains of psychiatry.

I have worked to strengthen attributes that make an effective psychiatrist. My work with the Geriatric Interest Group as a co-chair and the Aboriginal, Rural and Remote Health Group as a treasurer, in addition my work in my administrative and direct service-providing roles at SWITCH, have taught me how to collaborate with various disciplines, colleagues, administrators and clients. These same experiences, plus those in clerkship rotations, honed my speaking and listening skills. Collaboration and communication are two of the most crucial skills required for a career in psychiatry.

Through experience, I intend to improve my clinical confidence, comfort level with conflict, and assertiveness. I recognize the importance of my own social support from my family, partner, and a strong peer group. I strive for balance and self-awareness and value spending time immersed in activities such as yoga, running, and reading. As a homegrown student who intends to practice in Saskatchewan, I would relish the opportunity to complete my training at home, starting my work to improve Saskatchewan's mental health.

Thank you for your consideration.



Sincerely,  
Candace Clerk

# Medical Expert **Action Words**

## Leader

Accelerated	Contracted	Facilitated	Instituted	Presided	Reviewed
Achieved	Decided	Governed	Lead	Prioritized	Scheduled
Administered	Delegated	Harmonized	Motivated	Produced	Spearheaded
Appointed	Designated	Hired	Named	Recommended	Strengthened
Assigned	Directed	Implemented	Negotiated	Reconciled	Supervised
Chaired	Executed	Improved	Oversaw	Reorganized	
Conducted	Evaluated	Initiated	Planned	Reported	

## Communicator

Addressed	Conferred	Documented	Inspired	Published	Suggested
Aided	Consulted	Drafted	Interpreted	Read	Summarized
Advised	Contributed	Edited	Interviewed	Recruited	Talked
Appraised	Convinced	Enlisted	Mediated	Represented	Translated
Arranged	Corresponded	Explained	Merged	Reported	Unified
Authored	Counselled	Expressed	Moderated	Resolved	Updated
Briefed	Debated	Formulated	Printed	Rewrote	Verbalized
Clarified	Directed	Influenced	Promoted	Spoke	Wrote

## Scholar

Analyzed	Critiqued	Extrapolated	Located	Solved	Uncovered
Calculated	Diagnosed	Gathered	Monitored	Studied	Verified
Catalogued	Discovered	Identified	Observed	Summarized	
Collected	Evaluated	Inspected	Organized	Surveyed	
Compared	Examined	Interpreted	Proved	Synthesized	
Conducted	Explored	Interviewed	Researched	Tabulated	
Correlated	Extracted	Investigated	Reviewed	Tested	

## Professional

Achieved	Expanded	Provided	Risked	Succeeded	Utilized
Adapted	Furnished	Raised	Saved	Supported	Widened
Attained	Increased	Recommended	Simplified	Surpassed	Won
Completed	Introduced	Reduced	Solved	Transferred	
Contributed	Multiplied	Restored	Streamlined	Troubleshoot	
Decreased	Opened	Revamped	Strengthened	Uncovered	
Eliminated	Pioneered	Revised	Structured	Unified	
Established	Proposed	Revitalized	Submitted	Upgraded	

## Health Advocate

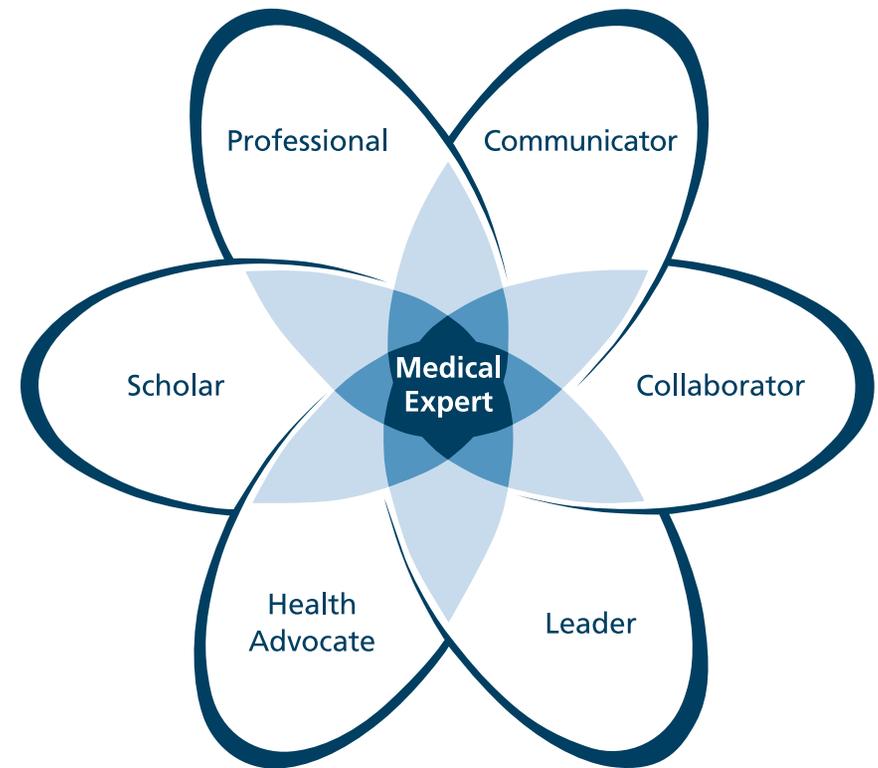
Advised	Clarified	Educated	Helped	Related	Tutored
Advocated	Coached	Empathized	Intervened	Represented	Volunteered
Aided	Communicated	Encouraged	Mentored	Saved	
Assessed	Coordinated	Expedited	Motivated	Served	
Assisted	Counselled	Facilitated	Provided	Suggested	
Attended	Delivered	Familiarized	Referred	Supported	
Cared	Diagnosed	Guided	Rehabilitated	Trained	

## Collaborator

Allied	Cooperated	Implemented	Managed	Resolved	Transitioned
Banded	Demonstrated	Interdisciplinary	Negotiated	Shared	Understood
Collaborated	Engaged	Joined	Participated	Teamed	
Combined	Established	Maintained	Respected	Transferred	

# CanMEDS Framework

CanMEDS is a framework that identifies and describes the abilities physicians require to effectively meet the health care needs of the people they serve. These abilities are grouped thematically under seven roles. A competent physician seamlessly integrates the competencies of all seven CanMEDS Roles. It is important to integrate the CanMEDS language into your residency application documents to emphasize your competencies in these areas.



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## Components of a Residency Application

There are several documents that make up a residency application, but not all documents are required for all programs or matches. Always consult the program descriptions for specific requirements available at [carms.ca](http://carms.ca). You should review these descriptions regularly to make sure you are aware of the latest requirements, as modifications are made throughout the year. These document types may be required in your applications to programs:

- College of Medicine Transcript
- Medical Student Performance Record (MSPR)
- CV
- Personal Letters (inline)
- Letters of Reference
- Proof of citizenship (notarized or certified)
- Photo (JPEG max. 2MBs)

AAMC's Careers in Medicine® (2016) notes that the number of residency programs to which you should apply is specific to your situation and comprised of:

- the content of your application (i.e., your competitiveness),
- the competitiveness of the specialty you're pursuing,
- the competitiveness of the programs you're pursuing,
- your geographic restrictions, and
- any other constraints.

The more competitive the specialty and programs and the more constrained you are by location and other factors, the more programs you'll need to apply to for a successful match. Your ultimate goal: identifying enough programs you're willing to attend that, considering your specific situation, will land you a residency spot.

The most commonly reviewed file elements are the completeness of your documents and your application, the content of your LORs, and how you've aligned and conveyed your interest in the specific discipline or program.

## Writing Content

The **first paragraph** of the personal letter should align you with the prospective program. Answer the following questions to convince the program director or selection committee that they should keep reading.

1. What inspired you to apply to this program? (Besides the fact that they have residency seats!)
2. What makes your skill set, personality and background an asset to the program or profession? How are you a unique, well suited candidate?
3. In what way could you contribute to this specific programs's goals; research their disciplinary innovations, mission, vision and values.

In the **second paragraph** or the body of the personal letter, communicate your competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities) and experiences as they relate to the residency position. Choose only the most relevant highlights from your CV to demonstrate your capabilities and don't be afraid to utilize a cross-section of your experiences in Medicine.

In the **concluding paragraphs**, focus on your soft skills as a professional. What values do you bring to the program or discipline?

## Proofread and Critique Your Letter

In addition to accessing the OCA&M's CV and Personal Letter review services, have multiple people review your letters. Consider asking a recent MD graduate or your Synergy mentor to review your letters.

- Have you reviewed your document for spelling and grammatical errors?
- Have you revisited the program description on [carms.ca](http://carms.ca) to ensure you followed each program's directions for what to include in the letter?
- Were you concise in your letter?
- If the program specifies a word count for their letter, are you within it?

# Canadian Resident Matching Service (CaRMS) Timeline

The Canadian Resident Matching Service (CaRMS) is a national, independent, not-for-profit, fee-for-service organization that provides a fair, objective and transparent application and matching service for medical training throughout Canada. They have matched 70,000+ medical students to available residency training positions.

CaRMS administers the electronic process that matches medical students and residents with residency programs throughout the country.

2017 SEP 6	<b>CARMS ONLINE OPENS FOR APPLICANTS</b>		
2017 OCT 12	<b>PROGRAM SELECTION OPENS</b> <b>CAN START ASSIGNING DOCUMENTS TO PROGRAM</b>		
2017 NOV 1	<b>MSPR, TRANSCRIPT MILESTONE</b>		
2017 NOV 17	<b>MAIL LETTER OF REFERENCE MILESTONE</b>		
2017 NOV 21	<b>APPLICATION AND DOCUMENT SUBMISSION DEADLINE</b>		
2018 JAN 13	to	2018 FEB 4	<b>INTERVIEW PERIOD</b>
2018 FEB 15	<b>APPLICANT RANK ORDER LIST DEADLINE</b>		
2018 MAR 1	<b>MATCH DAY</b>		

## CaRMS help desk

help@carms.ca

1-877-227-6742

Always consult carms.ca for the most up-to-date match timelines, as they are time sensitive.

# Transition/Linking Words

Transition/Linking Words help guide the reader to understand the direction of your thought, from one significant idea to the next.

## Addition/Add information

actually  
additionally  
again  
along with  
also  
alternatively  
another  
and  
as a matter of fact  
as well  
as well as  
besides  
either (neither)  
equally important  
finally  
for example  
for instance  
indeed  
in addition  
in fact  
furthermore  
further  
likewise  
moreover  
much less  
next  
nor  
not only this

## Clarification

in other words  
for instance  
I mean  
that is to say  
to put it another way

## Concession

admittedly  
besides  
but even so  
even though  
nevertheless  
on the other hand

## Confirmation

after this  
afterwards  
before this  
eventually  
next  
previously  
subsequently  
then

## Conclude/Summarize

as a result  
finally  
in conclusion  
in summary  
to sum up  
therefore  
last

## Conflict

and yet  
but  
by way of contrast  
conversely  
however  
in contrast

## Consequence

if not  
in that case  
if so  
otherwise  
that being the case  
under the circumstances

## Continuation

after this  
afterwards  
before this  
eventually  
next  
previously  
subsequently  
then

## Contrast

although  
but  
even though  
however  
on the other hand  
otherwise  
still  
yet

on the other hand  
still  
through  
when in fact  
whereas  
while

## Chronological/Sequence

all of a sudden  
at first  
as long as  
at the present time/  
presently as long as  
as soon as  
at the same time  
at this instant  
currently  
first/second/third  
first and foremost  
first of all  
for a start  
from time to time  
in addition  
in a moment  
initially  
in the meantime  
occasionally  
to begin with  
without delay

## Effect/Result

accordingly  
as a result  
all things considered  
because  
consequently  
even so  
in effect/effectively  
for/for this reason  
hence  
then  
therefore

## Emphasis

above all  
again  
besides  
even more  
for this reason  
indeed  
in fact  
more  
importantly to  
repeat  
truly

## Identification

namely  
specifically  
that is to say  
thus

## Introduction

as an illustrator by  
way of example  
especially  
for example  
for instance  
for one thing  
including  
in particular  
notably  
such as  
to illustrate

## Reference

as for this  
concerning this  
considering this  
on the subject

## **Office of Career Advising and Mentorship (OCA&M)**

5834 – 107 Wiggins Road  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5E5  
Student Services, College of Medicine  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK Canada S7N 4L3

Email: [med.careeradvising@usask.ca](mailto:med.careeradvising@usask.ca)

Tel: (306) 966-7275

[medicine.usask.ca](http://medicine.usask.ca)

## **Student Employment and Career Centre (SECC)**

G50, Lower Marquis Hall (below the bookstore)  
97 Campus Drive  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK, Canada S7N 4L3

Email: [secc@usask.ca](mailto:secc@usask.ca)

Tel: (306) 966-5003

[usask.ca/secc](http://usask.ca/secc)

