

Creating a Highly Specific Letter of Reference

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Learner Audience: Anesthesiology residents

Background: Most letters of reference are very general in their scope. The resident asks an attending for a recommendation, and no more input is given by the resident to the attending. The resident's knowledge and skills can be verified to show that he is competent. His personality can be generally evaluated to show he can work with other people. This is appropriate but is lacking in specificity.

Needs Assessment: A specific learning program is needed to help the resident provide the attending with input from the resident to write a more specific recommendation.

Hypothesis: Documenting a resident's talents, application of talents, and strengths makes a letter of reference highly specific.

Curriculum Design: 1) **Talents:** Take the Strengthfinders test in order to find out the resident's top five talents. For example, the resident used his talent of ideation (his fascination by ideas) to develop a presentation relating his clinical experience to the anatomy laboratory. 2)

Talents in Action: Identify incidents in which the resident applied each of his talents. For example, the resident used his futuristic talent to plan for a conference presentation. 3) **Talent Relationships:** Evaluate the connections between striving talents (the *why* of a person), thinking talents (the *how* of a person), and relating talents (the *who* of a person) for this individual. 4) **Strengths:** Have the resident identify an activity that made him feel invigorated. For example, the resident was "glowing" when he helped an attending who had not performed blocks in a while to block an upper extremity while on call. 5) **Competence and Talents:** Break down the strengths to show this resident's particular competence (experiential knowledge and skills) and his talents that made this strength evident.

Outcome: The resident will know what information to supply to get a highly specific letter of reference. He will identify his talents and strengths.