



MASSACHUSETTS  
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- Graduate Student Division  
- Post Doctoral Division  
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*Office for Women's Careers*

### TIPS ON WRITING LETTERS OF SUPPORT FOR PROMOTION CONSIDERATION

What makes a letter of support—or rather, the candidate—stand out is **specificity**. Nothing is more humdrum than a letter of support that rehashes the candidate's *curriculum vitae*. The resulting letter becomes merely a checklist repeating the obvious rather than a vivid portrait. The most effective letters describe not merely the “what” of the candidate's accomplishments but the “how,” the “why,” and the “under what particular circumstances.” Has the clinician published in top journals during a particularly demanding period of training? Has the investigator done more than first meets the eye in terms of running a lab or spearheading research projects? Has the clinician consistently and generously taken time to supervise, support, and sponsor less experienced faculty?

The other helpful ingredient in a letter of support is a **value judgement**, stated from your position as an expert. Did the research change the direction of a field? Is it widely viewed as creative or innovative? Has a clinical insight or procedure become widely adopted or accepted? These kinds of judgements, which can be quite concise, provide crucial perspective that the CV alone cannot convey.

Finally, it is helpful to specifically go on record as to whether you support promotion at the specified level. End with that statement of support.

#### Examples of unhelpful statements:

“Dr. A is an accomplished [specialty] surgeon with a strong background in [related specialty].”  
[States the obvious.]

“Dr. B has been working fastidiously in this field for more than 15 years.” [States effort but not accomplishment.]

“Dr. C has ## publications in peer reviewed journals.” [Already clear from the CV.]

#### Examples of helpful statements:

“Dr. D is the most qualified young investigator I have encountered, with the training and ability necessary to revolutionize the field of [specialty].”

“Dr. E's continuous high level of scientific productivity is extraordinary and makes her a highly likely candidate for membership in [national society] and similar accolades.”

“In the [specific area of expertise] community Dr. F has changed the paradigm of care and is a leader in his field.”

“Dr. G has all the characteristics of being a ‘triple threat’: she has proven to be an outstanding physician, researcher and educator.”

“I trust Dr. H’s judgment completely and direct my patients specifically to his care despite the many [specific area] specialists in the area.”

“Even at this stage in his career, Dr. I is establishing himself as a pioneer in newer surgical techniques.”

*- David G. Hunter, MD, PhD, Boston Children’s Hospital Ophthalmologist-in-Chief and Richard Robb Chair in Ophthalmology; Professor and Vice Chair of Ophthalmology, Harvard Medical School*

*- Anne S. Levy, PhD, Senior Program Manager, Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Faculty Development*

“Dr. E’s continuous high level of scientific productivity is extraordinary and makes her a highly likely candidate for membership in [national society] and similar accolades.”

“In the [specific area of expertise] community Dr. G has changed the paradigm of care and is a leader in his field.”

“Dr. H has all the characteristics of being a ‘triple threat’: she has proven to be an outstanding physician, researcher and educator.”

“I trust Dr. I’s judgment completely and direct my patients specifically to his care despite the many [specific area] specialists in the area.”

“Even at this stage in his career, Dr. J is establishing himself as a pioneer in newer surgical techniques.”

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