

# 201 Reference Letters For Scholarships

***"A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world."*** John Le Caré

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— HENRY MARSHALL TORY, FOUNDING PRESIDENT, 1908

## Letters of Appraisal - Reports on the Applicant (maximum of 2)

**One report** should be from a person very familiar with your research AND other abilities – **Most recent research supervisor**

**Second report** should be from a person sufficiently familiar with your research and other abilities to provide a meaningful commentary.

**Note:** Cannot be completed by a proposed supervisor unless that person is currently your supervisor or has been your supervisor in the past.



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## Letters of Appraisal - Reports on the Applicant (maximum of 2)

### Completing Bachelor's degree/just starting graduate program

- Faculty members who have had sufficient opportunity to assess your potential e.g. Undergraduate Research projects/courses or extensive course projects
- If applicable, can assess the importance of your publications
- Industrial research supervisor (co-op or internship)

### Currently in a doctoral program

- Current doctoral thesis supervisor
- Prior Master's supervisor (best)
- Faculty members who have had sufficient opportunity to assess your potential at the Bachelor's or Master's level.



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# Who Should Write Your Letter?

Someone who knows you, is enthusiastic about you, and sees your value (as a role model, researcher, etc)

Individuals who are familiar with **skills** required, that is, individuals who can comment on your **academic** skills, your **research** abilities/potential, and your **communication/leadership** skills.

Individuals who can provide **examples** to support their points.

Individuals with whom you have worked closely, with whom you have developed a professional relationship. Shows you developing into a peer.

Individuals who have good writing skills and have a position of value.

YOU?

# What Information to Provide?

**All and any information that appraiser can use to write a stellar letter**

- CV or resume
- Copy of your transcript(s) – does not have to be official
- Copy of your research proposal
- Copy of your papers (if any)
- **DETAILS** of your research and leadership abilities and experiences

## Submission instructions

- Forms / Websites (letters must be upload online)
- Deadline

# A Good Letter of Appraisal

Focuses on the applicant and is enthusiastic.

Supports the information in the application. Addresses all criteria!

Provides **specific examples** of strengths, accomplishments and contributions of the applicant.

Comments on the quality of the applicant's **contributions** to R&D and their role in joint publications.

Comments on the **quality** of the journals in which the applicant has published.

**Demonstrates why** the applicant is of superior calibre especially with regard to communication, interpersonal and leadership abilities.

## Good Reference Letters

- Avoid meaningless words – “outstanding academics and very productive in his research”.
- Jargon restricted
- Structure flows
- Longer letter\*

### Snapshots

© Original Artist



Translation: "You have a bruised rib."

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# 2016 Relative Weightings

Scholarship	Academic Excellence	Research Ability or Potential	Communication, Interpersonal or Leadership Abilities
<b>NSERC/SSHRC</b>			
Masters	50%	30%	20%
Doctoral	30%	50%	20%
NSERC Postdoc	0%	70%	30%
	Achievements and Activities	Characteristics & Abilities	Training Environment
CIHR M	40%	40%	20%
CIHR D	35%	40%	25%

# Criteria - Academic Excellence



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## Criteria - Academic Excellence

- Transcripts
- Scholarships
- Duration of Previous Studies
- Comments from University to describe an International transcript



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# Criteria – Research Ability



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## Criteria – Research Ability

- Scholarships/awards (amount/prestige)
- Academic training and relevant work experience
- Research contributions (publications, patents, reports, posters)
- Research proposal (feasibility, merit, and significance)
- Critical thinking, originality, enthusiasm for research, autonomy, initiative, application of knowledge
- Ability to complete projects
- Journal clubs, blogs, tutoring, teaching in lab, summer student supervision

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# Criteria – Communication, Interpersonal & Leadership Abilities



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## Criteria – Communication, Interpersonal & Leadership Abilities

- Awards for posters, oral presentations, reports
- Professional and extra-curricular interactions
  - Teaching, supervision, project management, departmental/university committee involvement, work experience, elected positions, presentations for community, where you shown initiative
  - What does leadership/research/knowledge translation mean to you

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Dear Selection Committee,

SAMPLE

I am writing this letter to strongly recommend Mr. Smith for your program. I know Mr. Smith because he worked in my lab for one summer. Mr. Smith came to me a year ago to discuss the possibility of spending a summer working in my lab. I met with him and outlined a project. I gave him some background reading at our first meeting. By the time of our second meeting he had read what I had given him and prepared a two-page project description. This level of effort is typical of a good medical student who joins my lab, so I agreed to take him on for a summer.

During his time in my lab, Mr. Smith demonstrated a good work ethic and interpersonal skills. We outlined a scope of work to be completed, and he successfully completed that work in the time required. He put in extra hours as necessary in order to meet specific deadlines that I set. I teamed him up with another student to work on the project. He seemed to work well with the other student, and I found him very personable. Mr. Smith put in sufficient work to be a co-author on a manuscript.

Overall, I would strongly recommend Mr. Smith for a position in your program.

Sincerely,

Richard Hughes, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

[http://www-verimag.imag.fr/~plafourc/DIVERS/sample\\_letter.pdf](http://www-verimag.imag.fr/~plafourc/DIVERS/sample_letter.pdf)



# SAMPLE

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing this letter to give my highest possible recommendation for Mr. Smith. I know Mr. Smith through his work in my laboratory. Mr. Smith first approached me two years ago about the possibility of work in my laboratory for a summer. At our first meeting I described the general outline of the project he might work on. He asked good questions and appeared intelligent. He then went to the library and found many papers on the subject and read them carefully. He did this independently - I did not ask him to do this. I learned that he had done this at our second meeting, and I was quite impressed at his motivation and independence. Mr. Smith obtained funding from a program at our University to work in the lab for a summer.

During that summer, Mr. Smith demonstrated the ability to work independently with great creativity and enthusiasm. He also put in many long hours. He worked as hard as my best graduate student. I teamed Mr. Smith with another student to work on a project involving testing of patients having shoulder pathology. The project included recruiting patients, testing patients using biomechanical instrumentation, and data analysis. Mr. Smith excelled in each one of these areas. His interpersonal skills were excellent. He "schmoozed" the clinical staff to facilitate recruitment of patients. He tested the patients professionally. Sometimes this testing required long days due to the extensive setup and calibration of equipment each morning before the clinic began operation.

He stayed after the testing sessions to back up data, clean up the area, and start data processing programs to run overnight. He was usually the first one in the lab in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. The other student working with Mr. Smith commented favorably about working with Mr. Smith. He said the Mr. Smith got along well with everyone, pulled his own weight on the project, and had the ability to compromise with other team members. One incident illustrates this point. There is a staff member in an adjoining lab that is a rather prickly person who has had many problems with students in the past. Mr. Smith had to interact with this staff person in order to get his project done. Mr. Smith was able to find a common interest with this staff person, which was folk dancing, and build a rapport based on this mutual interest. At the end of the summer the staff person noted what a pleasure it was to work with Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith also volunteered to help others in the lab. One of the other students was doing a project on knee biomechanics, and it required harvesting knees from the University's morgue. Mr. Smith volunteered to help harvest the knees on several occasions. I asked the graduate student in charge of that project about Mr. Smith, and he commented that Mr. Smith has excellent dissection skills.

I was especially taken by Mr. Smith's creative mind and independent work ethic. He continued to read the literature independently and generate interesting hypotheses. We met about every other week, and at several meetings he presented papers and information that was new to me. By the end of the summer he was introducing me to scientific papers that were directly relevant to his study that I hadn't seen before. Mr. Smith also showed remarkable problem solving ability. Our instrumentation system began having problems midway through his experiment. Mr. Smith spent a full weekend troubleshooting the system. He discovered there was a loose wire in the A/D connection box. Mr. Smith is going to be first author on a manuscript that he is preparing for publication. He followed through on his promise to write the manuscript during his M2 year. Moreover, he handled the manuscript revisions and saw the manuscript through to publication. This illustrates his high level of motivation.

In summary, Mr. Smith is clearly the best student I have worked with in the last 10 years. I would very much like him match to our residency program. Even though I hope he stays here, I think he would be an outstanding asset to your program. I give him my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

Richard Hughes, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor



# **What Not to Do**

Asking someone to write a letter just before/after class, in the hallway.

Push for a positive response (individual may decline to write a letter, knowing it would not help your application).

Wait until the last minute to ask for a letter.

Not provide submission details.

Not provide supporting information; not provide the information all at once.

# **What You Can (and Must) Do**

Highlight your academic and non-academic activities – on and off campus with details of exactly what you do – 5 W's

Provide some insight into who you are/reflections

Follow-up

# Important Considerations in Completing Forms

## The Student's View

138-1328

Canadian Institutes of Health Research		Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada		Training Module		PROTECTED WHEN COMPLETED	
Program		CIHR	RADP	SMC*	Partnership Program	Michael Smith	For CIHR Use Only
Doctoral Research Award	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Fellowship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other Fellowship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Senior Research Fellowship (Phase 1)***	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other Studentship (Phase 1)***	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>							
* A letter of intent to CIHR must precede submission to these programs.							
These programs require nomination by a Canadian institution.							
Candidate		Surname: Antonescu	Given Names: Costin				
Citizenship		Canadian <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Permanent Resident <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>			
1 Primary Supervisor:		Klip	Surname: Amira	Given Names: Amira			
2 Co-Supervisor (if applicable):							
Location where research will be conducted Institution or Organization The Hospital for Sick Children			Period of support requested: Years <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Months <input type="checkbox"/>		Language in which proposal is written English <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> French <input type="checkbox"/>		
Faculty / School Research Institute Department Programme in Cell Biology			Descriptions: Provide up to 10 keywords to describe this research project. cell culture, transgenic mice, glucose transporters, insulin signaling, p38 MAP K, adenosine, siRNA, glucose uptake				
Institution which will administer the funds The Hospital for Sick Children							
Project Title Testing the hypothesis that P38 MAPK participates in whole-body glucose homeostasis							
Do you agree to the release of the information on pages 1, 6 and 7 (proposed training program) for the purpose of determining potential eligibility for other sources of funding either within CIHR budgets for strategic research or from other organizations? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>							
I have read the general conditions governing Grants and Awards as well as the statements "The Meaning of Signatures on Application Forms" as outlined in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Grants and Awards Guide. I understand that these conditions apply to my application and are hereby accepted by the candidate and the candidate's institution.							
Signatures		Candidate <i>Costin Antonescu</i> Costin Antonescu	Primary Supervisor and Co-Supervisor (if applicable) <i>Amira Klip</i> Name: Dr. Amira Klip	Head of Department at Proposed training location <i>Sergio Grinstein</i> Name: Dr. Sergio Grinstein	Date: 10-10-03	Date: Oct 10, 2003	Date: 14 October 2003
Training Module, Page 1, (07/2002)							

Canada

# Important Considerations in Completing Forms

## The Reviewer's View

