

REFERENCES

References can make or break your success in getting the job you want. Verifying past employment and reference checking are important tools when making a hiring decision, especially if there are two very strong candidates after interviews are complete. For this reason, references should be developed before you need them and treated with care and attention long after your work search has been successfully concluded.

Take this quiz to check what you know about references. (Answers on back page)

1. REFERENCE LETTERS ARE AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE TO REFERENCES..... T / F
2. ONLY PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS CAN BE USED AS REFERENCES..... T / F
3. YOU SHOULD ASK PERMISSION TO USE A PERSON AS A REFERENCE EACH TIME YOU JOB SEARCH, EVEN IF IT IS IN THE SAME YEAR..... T / F
4. MOST PEOPLE KNOW WHAT'S EXPECTED OF THEM IF THEY ARE ASKED TO GIVE A REFERENCE... T / F
5. NOT EVERYONE YOU ASK WILL BE WILLING TO GIVE YOU A POSITIVE REFERENCE..... T / F
6. YOU DON'T HAVE TO ASK PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS TO GIVE YOU A REFERENCE, IT'S EXPECTED..... T / F
7. THREE REFERENCES ARE ALL ANYONE NEEDS FOR EACH JOB SEARCH..... T / F
8. YOU SHOULD PROVIDE REFERENCES WHEN YOU SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION..... T / F

References, Reference Letters, Background Checks

References

Prospective employers want to talk to people who can discuss the quality of your specific experiences, work habits, strengths, weaknesses and past performance of work-related tasks. People who are able to do this and are willing to speak on your behalf are your potential references.

Reference Letters

These letters are not a replacement for references. Rather, they allow you to use what others have commended you for. Reference letters are generally valuable to recruiters only if they are recent and specify who the writer is, how they know you, and their personal experience with your specific accomplishments, projects or contributions. Employers may contact reference letter authors for a more in-depth conversation.

Background Checks

Background checks are common and are done to protect employers from liability issues. They may include drug tests, criminal, credit, educational, social media or residential history checks, to name a few.

Who To Use As References

Some job seekers make the mistake of choosing people with important titles but who aren't familiar with their work. It is better to use someone who knows about and can discuss your work-related competencies.

While most employers require and check references, many companies have a policy of providing only employment verification details. For this reason, it is a good idea to start identifying prospective references early. Begin by identifying at least two good potential references for each job, project or volunteer activity in which you are involved or decide to leave. Choose people who have seen your work and support you.

Most job seekers consider only former supervisors as potential references, neglecting people who have also 'witnessed' relevant accomplishments and abilities. References must be willing and able to comment on specifics that will get you hired for the type of work you seek. Prospective references may include:

- Past and present employers, volunteer supervisors or someone in a supervisory role in another department or work group with whom you have worked closely
- Professors, instructors or faculty members if you are a current student or a recent graduate
- Colleagues or co-workers who can speak about demonstrated skills and effectiveness
- Advisors, mentors or professionals in the field who know you well or with whom you have served on committees or events.
- Former clients, customers or suppliers who can speak about your sales and service excellence

Reference planning worksheet

PLACE OF PAID OR VOLUNTEER WORK	KEY PROJECTS OR ACCOMPLISHMENTS	SKILLS/ABILITIES PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS	MANAGER/SUPERVISOR/ ADVISOR/CLIENT	CURRENT TITLE COMPANY & PHONE NO.	ADDITIONAL CONTACT INFO.	PERMISSION CALL & OUTCOME

Contacting references

- Review reference lists you have used before. Have people changed companies or job titles? Have you verified their current details? When are the people you are using reachable?
- It is critical to contact everyone you expect to use as references early to ask their permission. Expect some to decline. Many organizations require a "Release of Information". Never provide anyone's name without asking permission. Someone who is surprised and unprepared may harm your candidacy.
- Assist your references in remembering your accomplishments and strengths. Provide them with a copy of your resume and explain how you see specific aspects of your work with them as relevant to the job you now seek. They will appreciate your help in identifying your contribution.
- For most undergraduates and graduates, employers will not expect references prior to an interview. Once references are provided to an interviewer, contact your references to let them know who/what company may be calling. Remind them of the position and some of the job requirements.
- Once you accept a position, write thank you notes to people who agreed to act as references. Update them on your new employment and contact information, and invite them to stay a part of your network.



Formatting a reference list

- On a separate page, with a title of “References for <YOUR NAME>” and your contact information, list three to five references. Use the same paper, font and format as used for your resume and cover letter.
- With their permission, include the reference’s full name, current title, company, city, province and telephone number where they may be reached during normal working hours. Optional but appreciated information may include full address, email, working hours (if non-standard), business relationship to you, and the area of your ability to which this particular reference can speak knowledgeably.

Each reference on your page may look like this:

Susan Smith, General Manager
ABC Consulting
123 Anywhere Street, MyTown, My Prov.
403.123.4567
E-mail: s.smith@ABCConsulting.ca
Hours: Monday – Thursday 7:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Relationship: Previous Supervisor, Local Events R Us
Key Reference Areas: Sales Ability, Event Planning

Frequently Asked Reference Questions

Q: I have never had a ‘real job’ before so I don’t have any references!

A: Approach people where you volunteer or university instructors able to comment on your ability. Consider business people who know you well enough to relate their experience with you to a business setting.

Q: All the people I worked for have left the company and/or the company no longer exists.

A: A prospective employer will still want to speak with someone. Consider tracking down a supervisor at their new place of business. This may work in your favour if the policy of the company you worked for does not provide references. These references are now more free to speak.

Q: I didn’t get along with my last boss. Do I have to include them as a reference?

A: Not providing a reference from your last employer raises red flags. Be ready to neutrally explain why you have chosen not to use them. A prospective employer may still call. Make sure you have other positive references, preferably from the same place.

- Consider another manager, supervisor or client from the company who knows your work.
- Your counterparts in other organizations or professional associations may be able to comment on your skill level. Consider people you have worked with on events, committees, etc.
- As a last resort, use the company’s Human Resources representative.

Q: Someone I want for a reference has never been one and is hesitant to do this.

A: Prepare a small package for them to review before they make a decision. Include your resume, and key points you feel are common to both the job you seek and the person’s experience with you. Offer to review this material with them. Reassure them that you would be grateful for their assistance.

Q: My job is temporary and my boss knows I’m looking. Do I ask him/her to be a reference?

A: If your current employer knows you are looking, and are supportive, ask them. Offer to do a short summary that outlines projects you have worked on and contributions you have made. Provide them with your resume.

Q: I am currently working and don’t want my employer to know I am looking for a new job.

A: It is perfectly acceptable to request that your current employer not be contacted at this time. Ensure you have an alternative reference for your current job. Consider a portfolio of recent work. Be aware a prospective employer may still request to speak with your current employer as a final step. Ask that you be notified first so you can be the one to tell your current employer.



Information Commonly Requested of References

Basic questions verifying information provided by the candidate

Questions asked of references are similar to the ones a candidate would be asked in the interview

- Dates of employment, titles, responsibilities, job description and salary range.
- Length of time the reference has known the candidate, to whom the candidate reported, how long the candidate was under the reference's supervision.
- Why the candidate left or is leaving.
- How well the reference knows the candidate's work.
- Accuracy of the candidate's resume or LinkedIn claims.

Targeted questions for more comprehensive information

- What would the reference consider as the candidate's strengths and shortcomings? How does the candidate compare to current/past staff holding similar positions?
- Quality of work, level and type of responsibility given to the candidate and supervision required.
- How the reference would rate the candidate's competence in particular areas, examples of weaknesses and positive job performance, their punctuality, reliability and ability to get along with other staff.
- Who else the reference checker could speak to, whether anything would disqualify the candidate for the position, or that the reference checker should know that hasn't been asked.
- The candidate's fit with corporate culture.
- Whether the reference would hire the candidate again if they had a position for which the candidate was qualified.

Tips

- ✓ Don't view communicating with references as bothering them. Talking with them makes it easier for them to help you. Keep references in the loop about your job search progress. They sometimes provide new ideas, job leads and contacts. They are a part of your growing professional network.
- ✓ Choose individuals who can speak convincingly, vouch for your performance record, and who think highly of you, your work and your abilities.
- ✓ References should be equal or superior in position to the one for which you are applying.
- ✓ Be selective when supplying references – don't put them on your resume or provide them prior to being asked. Make sure a prospective employer is genuinely interested in you first. If references are called too many times, they may become less enthusiastic.
- ✓ Do you have a reference question? Call Career Services to discuss strategies to address it.

Quiz Answers - TRUE: 3, 5 FALSE: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8

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CAREER SERVICES

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