

FAQs About References

What is a reference?

A reference is someone who knows you well and can discuss your job related qualifications and skills with a potential employer. Many employers will want a list of your references, including addresses and phone numbers. Some employers may request letters of recommendation from your references or have a special form they want completed by your references.

How many references do I need?

You will need at least three to five references as a recent college graduate. It is also a good idea to tailor your references to the job for which you are applying. For example, you may pick the best three out of ten references that can best detail specific skills that are required by the potential employer.

Who do I ask to be my reference?

Someone who knows you well through a job, class or organization writes the best letters of recommendation. Find someone who knows you from different perspectives and who can make a positive statement about your skills, work habits, and other qualifications. There are three main kinds of references:

- 1. Professional**
- 2. Academic**
- 3. Personal**

Professional References are the best help. Professional references can provide the potential employer with specific work habits and abilities. Your references do not need to be the company president. It is better to use a reference that knows your work habits well than a company president who may not.

Academic References can also assist you in finding a job in your chosen field. A professor in your major can attest to your knowledge base and study habits. Academic references are a must for graduate school.

Personal References are usually not recommended unless the potential employer specifically asks for them. These references usually include friends, neighbors or other acquaintances who know you well and understand your values, morals and integrity. Generally, personal references get the least amount of attention from employers.

How do I ask someone to be my reference?

Remember to always act in a professional manner when asking someone to be a reference for you. Do not hand over a form to the faculty/staff member or employer and expect them to fill it out. Rather, arrange for a meeting to discuss your request. Explain why you are asking this particular person to be a reference and ask if they could give a favorable recommendation for you. Ask if they feel comfortable affirming your qualities, skills or talents. If the person has any reservations about your qualifications, now is the time to discuss them.

How can I help my references?

Once the reference has agreed to your request, the next step is to discuss criteria you hope your reference will address. For example, the future employer may want specific information on your academic performances or comments on personal attributes and characteristics.

To make the process go as smoothly as possible:

1. Get your references involved in your job campaign. Let them know what you are looking for and update them on any progress you have made.
2. Inform them whether the recommendation is to be used for a job search or graduate/professional school. This will make a difference as to how the recommendation should be written or organized.
3. Provide specific details about what is being applied for (job description, assistantship criteria, catalog description of the course of study, etc.).

4. If applying for graduate or professional school, give a copy of any completed application form including a personal statement or essay you have written.
5. If applying for a job, give them a copy of your resume and possibly your portfolio.
6. Remind them of the courses, special projects, or extra-curricular activities on which you worked (and why commenting on them might be relevant).
7. Let your reference know when a potential employer might call. Then supply the reference with a list of questions that the employer might ask.
8. If the reference is writing a letter, include a stamped, addressed envelope if the letter is to be mailed off-campus.
9. Give the deadline by which your letter must be mailed (Try to give your reference at least two weeks to complete the task).

Should I keep in touch?

Always write a thank you note to each person who serves as a reference for you, and let them know the results of your application or search. You can even ask your references for advice and help with your search. By keeping in contact with your references you can expand your network or job referral contacts.

Should I include the statement "References Available Upon Request" on my resume?

While this has been a common practice on resumes, it is not necessary as employers assume that you will have a list of references available for them upon request. If you do include this statement, be sure you have the list available.

What is on a reference page?

You may use a separate page that consists of the following information for each reference:

- full professional name
- title or office, organization
- address, city, state, zip code
- telephone number
- ask to use home address and home telephone
- email addresses

Use the same heading as the first page of your resume and title your reference page.

What is a letter of recommendation?

A potential employer or graduate school could require either a generic letter or a specific letter of recommendation. Be sure to keep copies of all your letters of recommendation.

Generic Letters identify your skills and qualifications in a generic letter with no address.

Specific Letters identify your skills and qualifications specific to the job or school to which you are applying. This letter is addressed to a specific employer or person.

Information on the Web about references

- <http://jobsearch.about.com/library/blreference.htm>
- http://www.quintcareers.com/job_references.html