

Job References

References, or letters of recommendation, are an important component of your total application package. Although each organization has its own unique hiring process, rarely is a person hired without a reference check. Most employers use references as one method of ensuring that they get the right person for the job.

Do not underestimate the value of your references. Remember, the employer is preparing to make a big investment in you. He or she wants feedback from people who know you and can attest to your qualifications. Follow the guidelines listed below to ensure that you choose the “right” people to be references and that the references written on your behalf contribute toward your getting the job.

Start early.

Make it a practice to obtain letters of recommendation throughout your college career. Look for people who can comment favorably on your skills and achievements and ask them for recommendations before they leave their present position, go on sabbatical, or forget you.

Choose references carefully.

The key is to select people who know your strengths and abilities — and who will make positive comments about you. Look at your references from the employer’s perspective. He or she is looking for a candidate who can handle the re-

sponsibilities of the position. Contact people who have observed you demonstrating skills related to your preferred position and can talk about your abilities with conviction.

Individuals who do not know you well may not be able to comment on your academic or professional abilities. References from family, friends, or neighbors — no matter how well known they may be — who simply mention what a nice person you are do not hold much weight with employers. Any employer who wishes to hire you is more interested in what the person says about your ability to perform the job than who the person is.

Assess the writing ability of your references. Do they have a way with words? Can they recommend you skillfully? Do they have a good sense of what to include? Having one bad, or lukewarm, reference could cost you the job.

Ask appropriately.

Get permission to use someone as a reference. Discuss your need for references, and ask if he or she feels comfortable supporting your candidacy. If you detect reluctance, allow the individual to decline gracefully.

If you want a written recommendation to include with your credentials, ask if the individual has time to prepare a letter in the next two to three weeks. Recognize that your reference is undoubtedly busy and that writing a good letter will take some time, so don’t demand it immediately. Letters produced in a hurry will not be of much value.

Provide background information.

After you've lined up an advocate, make an appointment to discuss your job search. Provide some background information so your reference writer will be better equipped to comment on the qualifications you have. Useful documents include a resume, a job description, and a transcript or list of classes with grades. There should be supporting evidence for every remark that is made about you.

Clarify the letter's purpose.

If you want a written recommendation, explain how your letter will be used and who will receive it. Is it a general, all-purpose letter to be used for any potential employer, or are you sending it to a specific employer regarding an actual job opening?

If you are applying for a specific job, tell your reference about the position and the employer. Explaining the nature of the job is especially important if the reference is unfamiliar with your field.

Discuss the qualifications required for the position and how your background relates to them. Talk about the experiences that helped you acquire them. The more information your reference has about the kind of positions to which you will be applying, the more helpful he or she can be. For example, if your former internship supervisor knows that your prospective job requires expertise in accounting and familiarity with business applications software, he/she is more likely to comment upon your specific abilities in these areas.

It is also helpful to tell your writer:

- who the reader of the letter will be,
- the date the letter is needed,

- how to contact you if there are questions, and
- if you want a copy of the letter.

Follow through.

Keep your references informed. Be sure to write thank-you notes to everyone who provides a recommendation, and let your references know if you got the job. The feedback you provide will build a relationship in case you ever need another recommendation.

Keep track of references.

If you or your references move frequently, take steps to ensure that your prospective employer will be able to get information easily. Keep copies of your recommendations in a file so you will have them handy when a prospective employer requests them.

It is also helpful to maintain current contact information for your references in case an employer wants to verify the information in recommendation letters or ask them additional questions about your qualifications.

Don't list references on your resume.

It is difficult to list all of your qualifications on a single page and your references too. Save the space on your resume for information about your qualifications, and list your references on a separate sheet of paper that matches your resume paper. See page four for an example.

Be sure to keep a list of references with you when you are interviewing so you can be prepared to present them if an employer asks for them. If you have a portfolio, keep the list in it along with any actual reference letters.

Questions that Your Reference May Be Asked

- Can you describe how you know the candidate? And for how long?
- How would you rate the candidate's skills in ____?
- Describe the candidate's communication skills?
- How well does the candidate work under pressure?
- How well does the candidate work in a group? Is he/she a team player?
- How would you describe the candidate's general work traits, such as work attitude, professionalism, and time management skills? Is he/she reliable...responsible...mature?
- Describe the candidate's honesty... integrity...work ethics.
- What are the candidate's strengths? Weaknesses?
- How receptive is the candidate to new ideas and procedures?
- How well does the candidate take constructive criticism?
- If you were in a position to hire this candidate, would you?
- Describe the candidate's leadership skills.
- Do you have any additional comments that might help us to make a better decision about the candidate?

Keys to Obtaining Good Job References

- Start early
- Think carefully about your reference choices
- Get permission and ask appropriately
- Provide background information
- Clarify the purpose of the reference
- Keep your references informed
- Thank your references
- Maintain current information on your references
- Exclude names of references from your resume

For additional information

Visit the Career Services website at www.clarion.edu/career for additional information about preparing for a job search.

Center for Career and Professional Development
Clarion University
419 Becht Hall
Clarion, PA 16214
814-393-2323
www.clarion.edu/career
careers@clarion.edu
7/2015



Sample Reference List

- Before you develop your list of references, ask each reference about his/her preference with regard to contact information.
- If your reference works, he/she will probably prefer that you use work information.
- If he/she is retired, put **(Retired)** after the former job title. Include the reference's former employer. However, include the reference's preferred address, phone number, and e-mail address.
- Most individuals prefer to be contacted by phone during the day, but check with your reference regarding his/her preference. The same goes for e-mail addresses, since he/she may have two e-mail addresses: one for work and one for personal use..

References for [Your Name]
Address
Phone Number (Ex: cell, home, etc.)
E-mail Address

Name of Reference #1 (Your relationship to this reference person)

Job Title
Organization
Street Address
City, ST Zip

Phone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx [Ex: daytime, work, evening, home, cell]

E-mail Address: [Use reference's preferred address]

Name of Reference #2 (Current or former work supervisor)

Job Title
Organization
Street Address
City, ST Zip

Phone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx

E-mail Address: [Use reference's preferred address]

Name of Reference #3 (Current or former professor)

Job Title (Retired)
Organization
Street Address
City, ST Zip

Phone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx

E-mail Address: [Use reference's preferred address]

Name of Reference #4 (Coach...advisor...etc.)

Job Title
Organization
Street Address
City, ST Zip

Phone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx

E-mail Address: [Use reference's preferred address]