

References

1. Start Building Your Reference Network Before You Need It

The time to start thinking about your post-graduation references is not when you begin the application process. **It is NOW!** Employers often ask references:

- 1) How long/well do you know this candidate and in what capacity?
- 2) How does this candidate stand out among their peers (academically, professionally, socially, etc.)?
- 3) How would you rate this candidate on the following skills...?

If your reference only knows you as ‘that student who commented once or twice in my class a couple years ago’, it can be difficult to be a strong reference. References are most powerful when they have seen you (and been impressed by you) in a variety of situations. It also helps when they can comment on what you have to offer that is relevant to your audience. They should typically be supervisors, professors, etc. who have seen you make valuable contributions in work, school, research, leadership, volunteer, or extra-curricular settings.

2. How to Start

A reference list should include 3-6 professional contacts. Start building your reference network now by:

- 1) Seeking out research assistant, teaching assistant, internship, employment, volunteer, or other extracurricular opportunities that are relevant to your career goals;
- 2) Asking supervisors and co-workers for reference letters and/or to recommend you on LinkedIn* while you are working together or shortly thereafter. You want them to write the letter while you are fresh in their minds. In addition, more and more companies are implementing policies where they do not give out employee references. Instead, they will only verify employment and eligibility for re-hire in the future. So, do everything you can to get reference letters while you can.

*LinkedIn recommendations are typically only a few sentences. But they send a message to the social media world that someone thought highly enough of you to post it in the World Wide Web. A large number of recruiters seek job applicants via LinkedIn so the more quality recommendations you have online the better.

3. Etiquette for Approaching Your References

When to Ask

Instead of saying “Could you be a reference for me?” say something like: “I am applying for_____. Do you feel you know me well enough to write me a strong recommendation for this position?” Asking the question this way triggers a discussion of what the job is about and how this person’s specific perspective about you could be relevant and powerful to your audience. It also might help the recommender feel more comfortable declining your request without you taking it personally. Although that may be disappointing to hear, you are better off not having them as a reference because it could compromise your chances of getting hired or accepted in your desired grad school program. In addition, ask the reference about the ways they can be contacted (i.e., e-mail, cell phone, etc.) and include this on your reference list.

Etiquette for Approaching Your References (Continued)

How to Ask

Always let your references know when you will use them and give them several weeks' notice when you need them to write a letter. Because you cannot control the timing of a last-minute opportunities, providing them with a previous letter they wrote could save them a lot of time because they may only need to make a few tweaks before submitting it.

What to Provide Your Recommenders

Jobs

- A copy of your resume and cover letter (if applicable) that are tailored to this position
- A summary of what the company is looking for and how you feel you meet these standards

Grad Schools

- A copy of your resume/CV and intent letter
- A summary of this program's mission, vision, what they are looking for, and how you feel you fit what they are looking for

Follow-up

Always send a thank-you note to each of your references and keep them posted on your job search progress.

4. What Your Reference List Should Look Like

Your references should typically be listed separately from your resume, with the same header/format as your resume and cover letter. Your list of references should include each individual's name, job title, your relationship to them, and at least two ways to contact them (generally phone and email). To the right is an example of what to include. Remember, references should only be supplied when asked for them.