

Faculty and staff members are often asked to be a reference for a student or write a letter of recommendation. Requests vary, but typically are focused on evaluating a student's work in class or their performance from a job. Whatever the case may be, when providing a verbal or written recommendation, it is important to keep in mind certain guidelines that will protect you as well as the student.

[FERPA](#) addresses the issue of Consent to Disclosure [here](#) stating that "a faculty member should have a student sign a release before providing a job reference or a reference for the student for certain academic purposes, such as scholarships or awards."

The [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#) (NACE) created specific tips and guidelines for writing references and referrals, and CBBS agrees with the suggestions. This guide sheet highlights many of these tips but a complete list and supplemental article can be found at [naceweb.org](#).

By following these general guidelines for references/recommendations, faculty and staff members will be more likely to provide a solid and ethically sound recommendation for any of their students. For additional assistance, please contact the Office of Student Enrichment (Sirrine 374, 656-2478, enrich@clemson.edu).

reference suggestions

1. If asked by an employer or other organization to provide a reference for a student, **obtain a signed Student Reference Request & FERPA Release form** from the student. If you are unaware that the job applicant has named you as a reference, **ask the prospective employer for verification** that the person has given consent for the reference.
2. Relate references to the **specific position** for which the person applied and to the work that the applicant will perform.
3. **Avoid giving personal opinions.** If you make subjective statements or give opinions because they are requested, clearly identify them as opinions and not as fact. If you give an opinion, explain the incident or circumstances on which you base the opinion.
4. **Don't guess or speculate.** If someone asks you questions regarding personal characteristics about which you have no knowledge, state that you have no knowledge.
5. **Be factual** while not to editorialize. Avoid vague statements.
6. **Avoid lunch discussions or "off the record" telephone conversations** with prospective employers regarding a person's performance. There is no such thing as "off the record."

ethical considerations

1. Discuss the type of reference that you will provide with the person who asks you to be a reference. **If you cannot provide a good reference, be honest with the individual.**
2. **Information given should be factual**, based upon personal knowledge / observation of the person through direct contact with the person or obtained from the person's personnel or student record.
3. **State a confidentiality notice** in the reference letter to the employer observing that the information given should be confidential and is provided at the request of the student. Statements such as these give justification for the communication and leave no doubt that the information was not given to hurt a person's reputation.
4. **Do not include information that might indicate** an individual's race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, citizenship status, sex, or marital status. Opinions of performance should not be based on stereotypes.

sample reference letter

Sample may be adapted.

Dear **[Name of Graduate School/Awards Committee/Employer]**:

This reference letter is provided at the written request of **[name of student]**, who has asked me to serve as a reference on **[his/her]** behalf. It is my understanding that **[name of student]** is being considered by your organization for **[academic program/award/job title]**. Please be advised that the information contained in this letter is confidential and should be treated as such. The information should not be disclosed to **[name of student, if student has waived access]** or anyone in your organization who would not be involved in the hiring decision regarding this individual. Additionally, the information should not be disclosed to anyone outside of your organization without the consent of the student.

I have known **[name of student]** for the past **[number of months, semesters, years]** as **[he/she]** has taken the following courses which I teach: **[list courses, give brief description of content of course]**. As **[his/her]** professor, I have had an opportunity to observe the student's participation and interaction in class and to evaluate the student's knowledge of the subject matter. I would rate the student's overall performance in these subjects as **[below average, average, above average]**. This is evidenced by **[his/her]** grades—**[state the grades]**.

[One or two specific examples of the student's performance may be appropriate.] As part of **[his/her]** grade in **[name of course]**, the student was required to prepare a paper. The paper was designed to measure the student's ability to research, to analyze the results of the research, and to write. **[Discuss how the paper submitted by the student indicated to you the student's skills in these areas.]** Based upon this, I rate the student's skills **[indicate rating]**.

[It may be appropriate to give specific examples about the student's area of expertise.]

Based upon the student's academic performance and my understanding of the **[academic program/award/job title]** for which the student is applying, I believe the student would perform **[place overall evaluation here]**.

If you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,