

# Professional References and Letters of Recommendation

## References

References are **people who can attest to your professionalism, character and qualifications**. They support your résumé and cover letter. They should know you well and have a positive perception of you to share with potential employers.

### IDEAL CANDIDATES

- Past professors/teachers
- Previous employers/supervisors
- Trainers
- Volunteer managers

Sometimes employers will request a ‘peer reference.’ This means fellow students, coworkers, team members, etc. The reason is to gain an understanding of how you work and interact with others on your level.

### TIPS

- Never list family members as references, focus on people with titles related to your field.
- Always ask people when you want to list them as a reference, even if you used them before. Ask them several weeks before they might be contacted.
- Make sure your references know what the position and organization is so they can speak to that. Tell references you’ve used in the past if they will be contacted again. Asking once is not sufficient for all requests.
- Give your references a copy of your most current and relevant résumé or CV and remind them of your interactions with them, so they can give an accurate and positive report about you.
- It’s never too early to start building your pool of references.

### REFERENCE SHEET FORMAT

A reference list is typically a single page with three to four entries set up as illustrated below. Your name and contact information are listed at the top exactly like on your résumé and cover letter.

First Name Last Name  
Email Address | Phone Number | Physical Address/LinkedIn

Reference name, job title  
Company/organization  
Physical address  
Phone number  
Email address  
Relation to you

Reference name, job title  
Company/organization  
Physical address  
Phone number  
Email address  
Relation to you

Reference name, job title  
Company/organization  
Physical address  
Phone number  
Email address  
Relation to you

## Letters of Recommendation

Similar to verbal references, letters of recommendation from supervisors, professors, advisors, etc. **attest to your successes, character, progress and other impressive achievements.** As with references, letters of recommendation should be provided by those who have respect and appreciation for you and can communicate that.

### ASKING

You must ask someone to write a letter of recommendation. Some people decline: they don't have the time, they don't feel it's appropriate, they don't write letters of recommendation in general, etc.

When you ask, explain what program or position and organization you are applying to. This will help them gauge what to highlight in the letter. Also clarify the deadline and how to submit the letter—to you or the employer directly, electronic or hard copy.

Give the letter writers your résumé or CV and a list of your top achievements. Let them know how you've worked with them in the past, what your top skills are, etc. This is not boasting; it's helpful.

Many professionals have previously written or are trained to write letters of recommendation; you shouldn't have to guide them. Do communicate to them any specific requests from the employer or program, such as only one page, address to \_\_\_\_\_, specifically speak to the candidate's \_\_\_\_\_.

Many professionals, especially instructors and professors, are often flooded with recommendation requests. Therefore, they might ask you to draft your own letter for them to proof, edit and sign. In this case, have other mentors and peers review your letter and help you think of qualities, skills and experiences to include. This may feel unusual to you, but is a common practice.

**The more advance notice you give, the more likely someone will be able to accommodate your request. Aim for a minimum of two weeks.**

### REQUIRED INFORMATION

- Their title and organization
- How they know you and how long they have known you
- Brief evaluation/summary of their observation of your skills, strengths, qualifications, etc., with examples as needed
- Direct statement of recommendation and why

### SUGGESTED INFORMATION

- Potential
- Dependability/consistency
- Motivation/initiative
- Character
- Work ethic
- Examples of contributions
- Examples of achievements