



# References

## What is a Reference?

An employment reference is a person who will be able to positively comment on your skills, abilities, work habits, or character.

- ✓ Possible references for university students include former or current supervisors or co-workers at places of work or volunteer activities, professors who you have established a good rapport with through research or class work, sports coaches through extra-curricular activities, or even adult friends (not family members) who have known you for a number of years
- ✓ Choose references that are most relevant to the position or organization to which you are applying, if you have choices
- ✓ Avoid the temptation to approach someone who may have an impressive job title but doesn't know you well. The best references will know you well
- ✓ Recent graduates seeking employment should aim for 3-4 references: two work or volunteer related, one personal, and one academic
- ✓ Students looking for summer employment should have 2-3 references: 1-2 work or volunteer related, 1 academic, and/or 1 personal

## How Do I Ask someone to be a Reference for Me?

- ✓ Use please and thank you as they are doing you a professional favour
- ✓ Ask if they would be able to provide you with a positive reference
- ✓ Listen to their response carefully. If they don't sound enthusiastic about being a reference, consider other potential references
- ✓ If you have not worked or interacted with your potential reference for a while, remind them of any key projects you worked on together or for them, your job duties, or important characteristics that you feel you have demonstrated to them in the past

## When They Say Yes

- ✓ Provide each reference with a copy of your most current resume
- ✓ Gather their current contact information (address, phone, e-mail)
- ✓ Supply them with some information of your own: what types of jobs you are applying for, where you are in your job search process, your key skills and accomplishments
- ✓ Let your references know when you actually give their names to potential employers, like at an interview (provide them with the company and name of the person you gave their contact information to, as well as the position you applied for)
- ✓ Consider asking them for a LinkedIn recommendation to help in those situations where they are not available to speak with a potential employer

## Providing References

Employers may ask for your references at the conclusion of an interview, or they will contact you after the interview and ask for them at that time.

Don't include your references on your résumé or send your reference names when you are applying for a job. (You may put the phrase "References available upon request" at the bottom of your résumé, but this is optional, as it is understood that employers will ask you for references at some point after an interview).

Prepare a separate reference sheet which includes your references and their complete contact information. Be sure to take this sheet with you to all interviews, in case you are asked for your references then.

## Examples of Questions that Could Be Asked of Your References

- ✓ Please describe how you know the candidate, and for how long
- ✓ What was your relationship with the candidate – colleague, supervisor?
- ✓ What are some of the candidate's key strengths? Areas for growth?
- ✓ Please describe the candidate's skills in the area of communication
- ✓ How effective is the candidate in dealing with customers? Can you give me an example?
- ✓ Please describe how well the candidate works as part of a team
- ✓ How well does the candidate receive feedback?
- ✓ Please describe the candidate's organizational skills
- ✓ Was the candidate always present and punctual?
- ✓ Would you hire this candidate again? Why or why not?
- ✓ At the interview, the candidate discussed their work on \_\_\_\_\_. Can you describe their role in this project?
- ✓ Do you have any additional information or comments about this candidate?

## Maintaining Your References

Remember – no one owes you a reference. It's important to treat them with respect and be appreciative of their help.

- ✓ Stay in touch with your references. Let them know what you are doing even when you don't need a reference!
- ✓ If you hear of something that they might have an interest in, pass the information along to them
- ✓ Contact your references after an interview if they employer will be contacting them. It is helpful to provide them with some insights into the interviewer and if there are questions that you anticipate that they might ask
- ✓ Thank your references (even if you don't get the job)! Gifts are not necessary, however a well written thank you card or email will be appreciated
- ✓ Periodically update your references on your job search progress, and be sure to thank them after you do receive a job offer

## Have More Questions?

Please visit the AA&CC to speak with a career counsellor or employment coach.