



Employment references are people who can talk about your work experience, work habits, character, and skills. As part of the job search process, you may be asked to provide the names of people whom a potential employer can contact to find out more about you. This guide will walk you through who, when, and how to ask someone to be your reference when you are applying for a job.

Why do employers do reference checks?

Conducting a reference check allows employers to do a couple of things. First, it allows the hiring manager to verify what you have told them about yourself. Second, employers want to know more about you: not just *what* you did, but *how well* you did it. Speaking with someone who has worked with you closely will allow the employer to gain more information about what you would be like as their employee.

Who should you ask?

Your goal should be to have a list of 2-3 references that you can give to a hiring manager. Although employers will not usually contact your references until the end of the hiring process when you are a final candidate for a position, you will most likely be asked to supply a list of references and their contact information when you submit an application or after your first interview. Consider asking the following types of people for your references:

- People who have known you for at least a year, if not longer.
- People who are in good standing in the community.
- People who have known you in a professional capacity – they are more able to speak to your professional skills and abilities. At least one reference should be a professional reference.
- People that you have a good relationship with and who you know will have good things to say about you.
- People who work in the field you are interested in.



What's the difference between a personal and professional reference?

A professional reference is someone who has actually worked with you in a traditional job setting; anybody else is a personal reference. Examples of personal references might be a pastor, a mentor, or a family friend. If you do use a personal reference, avoid using family members, significant others, exes, or friends.

Steps to Identify Your References

1. Brainstorm who to ask by writing down the names of former and current:

- Coworkers
- Customers
- Supervisors and bosses
- Clients
- People you have supervised
- Teachers or professors
- Guidance counselors
- Coaches
- Mentors
- Other professional or academic contacts

2. Choose your top 3-5 potential references from your brainstormed list.

You will likely only be asked to provide three references but having one or two additional options in case someone declines is helpful.

3. Ask permission from your references before you create your References List.

Asking permission from your references is not simply courtesy; it is to make sure they are prepared to give you the best reference they can. When you begin contacting your references, here's what you should ask:

- Would you be willing to serve as a positive reference for me?
- How would you like to be contacted?
- What phone number and email should I list? (Note: It's preferable to list their work number and email. If you must list a personal email, make sure it is professional.)

Also:

- Describe the position you're applying for, including what skills and experience the position requires.
- Confirm with your reference how you first met and how long you've known each other.
- Consider sharing a copy of your most recent resume so they know what you've been doing since you worked with them.
- If you are asking someone to be a reference from your current place of employment, make sure they know if they can or cannot talk about the fact that you're applying for other jobs.

Note: Make sure to keep your references' contact information up to date.

Creating Your References List

Create a document using the same header and font that you use on your resume and cover letter. Your header should include your name and contact information and include the title “References.”

Example:

Jamie Anderson
Winooski, VT | (802) 555-1357 | janderson@email.com

Next, list each person and their contact information, leaving space between each entry. When listing your references, format them to include:

- Name
- Position/Title
- Company
- City, State
- Phone number(s)
- Email address

Examples:

Jen Brown
Shift Supervisor
KFC
Colchester, VT
802-555-1234
jenbrown@kfc.com

Or if your reference is no
longer at your former job➔

Alexis Smith
Former manager at The
Gap
Burlington, VT
802-555-6789
asmith@newjob.com

Following Up with Your References

Make sure to follow up with your references after the hiring process:

- Thank your reference with an email, note, card, call, or text.
- Let them know if you got the job or not.
- Clarify if they are willing to be a reference for you again. If so, update them on future positions.



For more on thanking someone for a reference, read this article: [Thank-You Letters for Recommendations and References \(thebalancecareers.com\)](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/thank-you-letters-for-recommendations-and-references/)