

Employment References

References are people who are familiar with some aspect of your life and are willing to share what they know with another person to derive a benefit for you. A reference also refers to the content of the information, insights, and experience that another person is willing to share about their relationship with and their experiences of you.

References are checked by potential employers, financial institutions, professional associations, clients and customers, and any organization that deems checking your personal integrity and ethics important. When you designate a list of references for a potential employer, the employer may or may not contact them. The employer may instead, or in addition, contact anyone who appears on your job application as your supervisor. Or, the employer may approach contacts and colleagues they know personally, or people their contacts know, in your industry or professional association, to obtain references.

References are provided either verbally or in writing. References are personal, professional, or employment related. Generally, you ask people to serve as your references when you believe that their shared comments and information about you will positively impact your goals.

Selecting references is challenging. You want to select people who are positive about you, articulate in their ability to talk about your contributions, and willing and available at short notice. Maintain positive references throughout your lifetime to ensure the accomplishment of your life missions.

References are potentially, powerfully positive people who help you achieve your dreams. References are often the final step before you accomplish your current objective. In your job search, as an example, the potential employer only spends time contacting references when he or she wants to confirm that you are the person they need for their open position. Your references and your relationship with your references can make your day. Don't treat references lightly.

Types of References

Employment References: People who are familiar with, and can speak positively about, your work. The best employment references are your current and former bosses. Colleagues, customers, and other managers are also effective references.

Professional References: People who are professional colleagues can serve as references. You may share a professional association membership or leadership position, have worked on a committee together, or organized and led the neighborhood condo association, as examples.

Personal References: People who know you and your personal life well. Personal references are often friends, fellow volunteers in social situations, ministers or other clergy, and colleagues who know you both personally and professionally.

Delivery of References

Written References: Written references are difficult to acquire and are quickly dated and inconsequential. Many employers refuse to provide written references for fear of eventual litigation. This is why so many organizations now refer requests for written references to their Human Resources offices; these offices usually provide employment verification and little more.

Many employers ask their employees to refrain from writing references as well; written references have a short shelf life but many recipients use them well beyond the time frame their writer intended.

You'll want to try to obtain written references from employers who are going out of business, bosses who are retiring or moving to another company, college professors who may not stay closely in touch with you, and colleagues with whom you expect little interaction in the future.

Verbal References: Verbal references are informal and you might expect more cooperation from your current supervisor and other important references when a written reference is not required from them. Many people are willing to discuss your strengths if you have been an effective, contributing employee. They wish you well and hope that your next professional or career moves are successful.

Always prepare your references in advance for a potential reference check. They can't help you if they don't know what you need. Especially in a job search, employers do check references more and more often.

Developing References

You'll want to develop employment references, professional references, and personal references while you are currently employed. Scrambling for references when you find yourself in the job market unexpectedly is the worst time to find and develop references.

Your attempts to reach people, prep potential references for a reference check, or bring an acquaintance or colleague potential reference up-to-date on your current situation and goals is difficult and time-consuming during a job search. Develop references before you need them.