

Making Smart Reference Choices



Osborne Village
RESOURCE CENTRE

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References

The interviews go well, references are requested and you leave confident that the deal is sealed. When you don't hear back, confusion sets in. What went wrong? Chances are your references turned out to be a detriment rather than a benefit. People often make critical errors when giving references to a potential employer; this can result in the loss of a job opportunity.

Employers call references to verify that you have a good work ethic as well as the skills and attributes listed on your resume. It's important to carefully select the people who will speak positively on your behalf—***even one mediocre reference may cost you the job.***

That time-tested cliché, “knowledge is power,” holds true when it comes to references. That's why it's important to know what type of questions an employer can ask before deciding who to contact with a reference request.

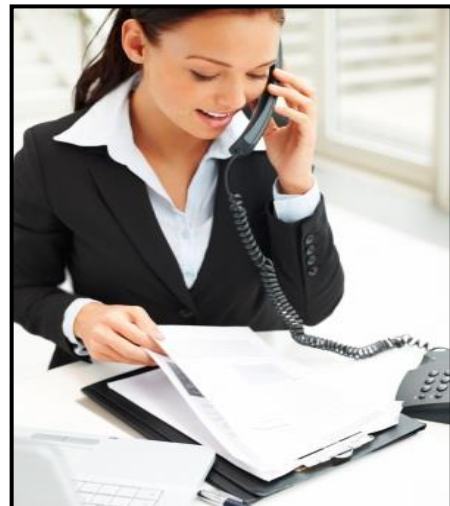
Professional Or Personal?

Employers want professional references. If they want character or personal references they will let you know.

What Can Employers Ask?

The questions listed below are fair game when it comes to a reference check.

- When did _____ work for your company? Could you confirm starting and ending employment dates?
- Why did _____ leave the company?
- What was their starting and ending salary?
- What was their position? Can you describe the job responsibilities?
- Could I briefly review _____'s resume? Does the job title and job description match the position that (name) held?
- Did _____ miss a lot of work? Was she/he frequently late? Were there any issues you are aware of that impacted her/his job performance?
- Did they get along well with management and co-workers?
- Was _____ promoted while with your company?



- Did _____ supervise other employees? How effectively? If I spoke to those employees, how do you think they would describe (name's) management style?
- How did _____ handle conflict? How about pressure? Stress? Change?
- Did you evaluate _____'s performance? Can you speak to their strong and weak points? What was noted as needing improvement during this performance review?
- What was _____ biggest accomplishment while working for your company?
- Would you rehire _____ if the opportunity arose?
- If I describe the position we are hiring for to you, could you describe how good a fit you think _____ would be for the position?
- Can you describe _____'s experience working as a member of a team?
- Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to share with me?

Source:

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/referencesrecommendations/a/refercheck.htm>

How Many Professional References?

Most often employers will ask for **3 professional references**. However, on a rare occasion you may be asked to provide 4 or 5 references, so be prepared. Unless an employer specifically asks for personal references always provide professional references.

Professional Reference Possibilities

Here is a list of professional reference possibilities:

- Managers (current or former)
- Supervisors (current or former, or from other departments)
- Co-workers / peers, business mentors
- Former customers / clients
- Vendors
- Supervisors in volunteer positions
- Professors / instructors / fellow students from a course you have recently completed



Sometimes job seekers get anxious about having to use their former supervisors or managers as references. This might be a non-issue. Before losing sleep over this, **check to see what the HR policy is at your former workplace. Many companies do not allow direct managers and**

supervisors to be references. This is an accepted fact in the business world and can be easily explained at an interview.

However, you may still be able to use someone from the organization as a reference. You could ask a manager or supervisor from another department that you worked with, but did not report to, to be a reference for you.

Also consider the level of job you are applying for. If it is at an executive level, choose references from different business levels; these could include members of a board or an association that you are involved in, or individuals from some other professional affiliation.



Who To Eliminate

Unless an employer is asking for a personal or character reference, people that you can immediately eliminate from your list of potential professional references include:

- Friends / Family / Fiancé
- Acquaintances from your social clubs
- Person you have not had contact with in the last 5 years
- Teachers from public school
- Sports team – coach/member
- Person who has been out of the workforce for 10 years or more
- Bartender from your local pub
- Person you have not worked with
- Book club members
- Person who has a bad reputation



There are always exceptions to the rules.

For instance if you have just graduated from high school and have kept in touch with your public school teachers, you may be able to use them as references. Likewise if you are on a sports team that requires teamwork and that is an integral part of the job you are applying for, you may consider using your coach or a teammate as a reference. Or if you have worked for a family business, it would be acceptable to use these individuals as references.

No Job References?

If you are looking for your first job, or have been **out of the workforce for a period of time**, there are **non-employment-related references** that you can use. Review the list below:

- Teachers / professors / instructors from a course you have recently completed
- Fellow students from a course you have recently completed
- Supervisor at a volunteer position
- Coach / teammate
- Mentor
- Minister
- Board member

Other possible references could include happy customers that you have provided services like:

- Babysitting
- House cleaning
- Lawn care
- Dog walking

Keep in mind that anyone you choose must still be able to speak about your work ethic, skills and attributes, just as a professional reference would.



Who To Choose

We want our references to say wonderful things so it's important to choose the right people. When considering who to choose as a reference, keep two things in mind:

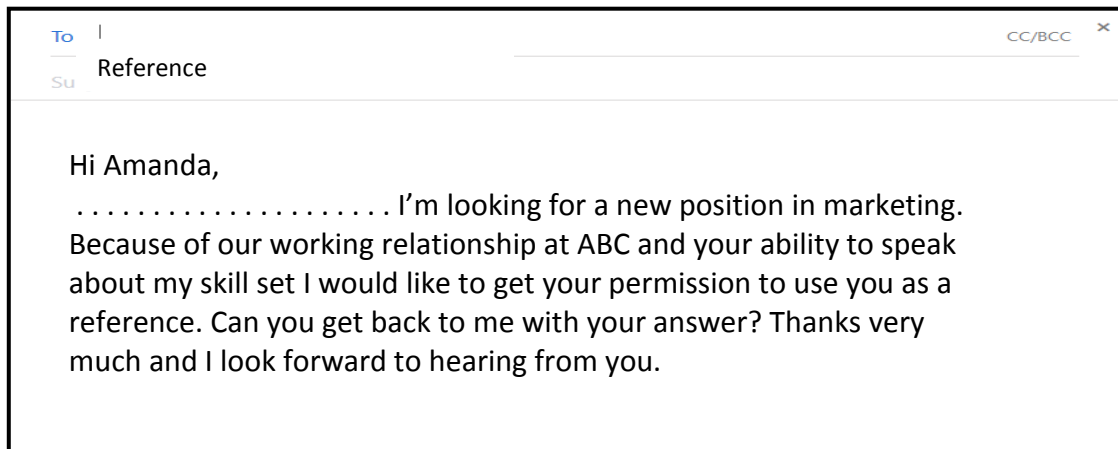
1. the job posting, and
2. who can speak about your skills, attributes and job performance in a positive manner.

When you have chosen people from your list of potential references it's time to:

- a) **contact the individual,**
- b) **let them you are looking for work, and**
- c) **ask for permission to use them as a reference.**

Take a look at the sample script on page 5. This could be delivered by email or by telephone.





After getting the okay from a potential reference you may assume that the person will be a positive reference. Think again. Do not assume someone will speak positively about you, just because they agree to be your reference. References are human beings, and human beings can make mistakes. A reference may inadvertently frame something in a way that will be perceived as negative by an employer. Worse still, a reference may speak negatively about you. That's why **you must confirm what your references will say about you**. Not confirming could cost you a desirable job opportunity.

To confirm what a reference will say, ask each person the following questions:

What do you think my strengths are?

What do you think my weaknesses are?

If you were in a position to hire me, would you?

Their answers will clearly indicate whether or not the person will be a positive reference.

If the person does not feel comfortable being a reference, don't push it; they may feel that too much time has gone by since you worked together. Or, if you are seeking a different type of job, they may feel inadequate to speak about your skill set.

Because a busy employer will only try to contact a reference so many times before giving up and moving onto the next candidate. Also **confirm your references' current contact information and availability during your job search. Most importantly, double check that they will be in town while you are in job search.**

Being a reference is a big responsibility. Your references may wonder how to best answer a prospective employer's questions. You can help your references help you. Read the next section to find out how.



If a company does not have a No References policy, and you left on bad terms, your former manager/supervisor may still be able to provide a reference. Call the person and ask if they will speak positively about your time with the organization. To get a sense of what they will say ask the three questions listed above. Do not discount the person until you have had the conversation.

Help Your References Help You

Let your references know that you will **send** a copy of your **resume** and the **job description after each interview**. These documents can act as a catalyst in helping your references remember specific examples of your work that illustrate your skill set to the prospective employer.

You can also ask your references to speak about a specific skill, attribute, project or achievement that you would like highlighted. This may also help a reference remember details they may have forgotten. Take a look at the sample email below.

Subject: Reference Check

Hi _____,

Had a great interview with ABC Company today for the _____ position, and hoping you will be called shortly for a reference check. I used the restructuring of our filing system to talk about my organizational skills and also about my training new staff to demonstrate my verbal communication skills. I forgot to mention my work on the newsletter. If the opportunity arises could you mention that when they call? To make things easier for you, I am attaching my resume and the job posting fyi.

Thanks again for being my reference.

Jude

Next we'll look at what **information to include on your Professional References** page.

Your Professional References Page

Start off with the **heading - Professional References**. Next, make it easy for the employer to contact your references by including the following information:

- **Name**
- Job Title, Company
- Relationship to candidate:
- Telephone: (work or residence)
- Cell:
- Email address

For a professional look, copy and paste your personal contact details from the top of your Resume to the top of your Professional References page.

NAME

Street Address, Winnipeg, MB L#L#L#

204-???-???? (Cell) • name@gmail.com

PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES

Jack Doe

Manager, ABC Company

Relationship to candidate: Manager

Telephone: 204.999.9999 (work)

Cell: 204.888.8888

doe.jack@shaw.ca

Name

Job Title, Company

Relationship to candidate:

Telephone: (work)

Cell:

Email

Name

Job Title, Company

Relationship to candidate:

Telephone: (work)

Cell:

Email

Special Circumstances

If your reference is going to be out of town for a week, and you are not sure when they will be making a final decision. Include in the reference the dates that the person will be out of town:

Jack Doe

Manager, ABC Company

Relationship to candidate: Manager

Telephone: 204.999.9999 (work)

Cell: 204.888.8888

doe.jack@shaw.ca

- ***Out of town from date to date, 2017***

If you know your reference is hard to get hold of, include the best time to call:

Jack Doe

Manager, ABC Company

Relationship to candidate: Manager

Telephone: 204.999.9999 (work)

Cell: 204.888.8888

doe.jack@shaw.ca

- ***Best time to call: 8 am CST***

If a company you worked for has a NO REFERENCES POLICY, include the HR department's telephone number and email as well as prohibiting staff references:

Jack Doe

Manager, ABC Company

Relationship to candidate: Manager

HR Department Telephone: 204-111-1111

abccompany@abc.net

- ***Company policy prohibits direct managers from providing references***
 - ***Company policy prohibits staff references***

If your former manager, supervisor or co-worker no longer at the place of employment where you both worked. List them as:

Jack Doe

Manager, Current Company

Relationship to candidate: Manager at company where you worked together

Telephone: 204.999.9999 (work)

Cell: 204.888.8888

doe.jack@shaw.ca

When To Provide References

- With your job application, **if references are requested** in the job posting
- At the interview
 - Give a copy to the interviewer:
 - ✓ at the start of the interview, or
 - ✓ sometime during the interview, or
 - ✓ before you leave.



When You Get The Job

It is proper business etiquette to thank you references when you find employment. We recommend that in addition to sending a **Thank You text or email** that you also send a **card**. In this day and age of electronic communication it is always a pleasant surprise to get something in the mail. A card demonstrates your appreciation and gratitude for a reference's assistance. Below is a sample thank you note.



Date

Hi _____,

Just wanted to let you know that ABC got back to me yesterday and offered me the job. They said that your comments about my work in reorganizing the filing system was one of the main reasons I was hired. Thanks for being my reference and for your help in my job search.

Jude

Maintain and Grow Your References

To ensure that you can call on peers, former managers, supervisors, and co-workers in the future, **keep in touch**. This could be as simple as sending an email once every few months with an article or news that would be interesting to that person, or congratulating them on an accomplishment.

More ways of keeping in touch:



Other Considerations

Letter of Recommendation

Employers always prefer professional references; however you could include a letter of recommendation in your portfolio.



New To The City

Provide the employer with a no-cost way of reaching your references. Supply the employer with a calling card and indicate the time difference. Also provide an email address, and the best time to contact the references.

To improve your chance of getting a professional reference, start volunteering as soon as possible, or get involved in the local association for your occupation.



Making A Career Change

Use professional references that are most relevant to the position you are applying for. This could include supervisors and co-workers from a volunteer position, a mentor, or if you are taking a course, an instructor.



Who Do I Need To Contact?

Jot down the names of the people who can speak about your skills, attributes and job performance, relevant to the job, in a positive manner.

Use the template on page 12 to create your Professional References page. This will ensure that you do not forget any vital information.

Professional References Template

Name	
Job Title, Company:	
Relationship to candidate:	
Telephone: work or residence	
Cell:	
Email address	
Special circumstance	

Name	
Job Title, Company:	
Relationship to candidate:	
Telephone: work or residence	
Cell:	
Email address	
Special circumstance	

Name	
Job Title, Company:	
Relationship to candidate:	
Telephone: work or residence	
Cell:	
Email address	
Special circumstance	

Name	
Job Title, Company:	
Relationship to candidate:	
Telephone: work or residence	
Cell:	
Email address	
Special circumstance	

Sign up for one, or all of OVRC's workshops to increase your job search skills and minimize the time it takes to get your next job. Choose from:

- Career Exploration
- My Target Company List
- Research = Job Search Success
- Scheduling for Success
- Branding Yourself
- Informational Interviews
- Making Smart Reference Choices
- Ace That Interview
- Job Search Club
- Living In My Job Search

Also pick up a copy of OVRC's brochure to learn more about each workshop, or speak to a staff person. Grab a copy of the monthly calendar to check public access hours.



OVRC provides a number of free pre-employment booklets to help you with your job search. They are located by the front door of the Centre. Take a look at the available titles and ask Judy for your free copy of any title you would like to take home.



We love getting feedback by mail, telephone, email or social media. Give us a "like" or tweet about our services, or contact OVRC's executive director, Keith Robinson at krobinson@ovrc.ca, or at 204.89.6503.



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