

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT REFERENCES

A major advantage to preparing who you are going to select in advance as references is that you can take the upper hand and identify the best references and control who you offer the employer as your references.



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Did You Know?

You can provide your list of “preferred” references, in the order you’d like to have them contacted.



If you provide a list of preferred references, it doesn't guarantee that the prospective employer won't contact people who aren't on your reference list, such as former managers, but sometimes they will take what you give them.



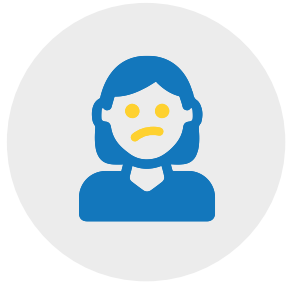
You will want to select 3-7 individuals to be your preferred references. Generally, a potential employer will want at least two of your references to be former employers.



When choosing references, consider current or former managers or supervisors, co-workers, peers, or team members, current or former customers of the company, vendors or suppliers, and people you have supervised.

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But be aware of sensitive situations—if you are using a reference from your current place of business, confirm that they are willing to keep it confidential. Your current employer may be disappointed to discover you are looking elsewhere for employment, and if you don’t get the job, things could really get awkward.



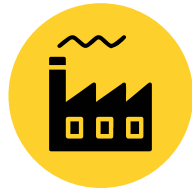
If you don’t have recent work experience, preferred references can be members of committees you volunteer with, or pro bono clients (unpaid work experience is still work experience!). If you have recent educational experience, you can also ask professors, faculty members, and advisors.

5 Things to Consider When Selecting References:

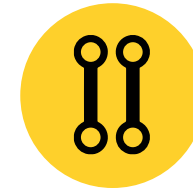
As with an in-person interview, preparation is key for success. Prepare just as diligently for a phone interview as you would for an in-person interview. Otherwise, you might not get the opportunity to move on to successive interview rounds.



Their knowledge of and opinion of your abilities



Their knowledge of the industry in which you are applying for a new job



Their job title (Did they supervise you? Work parallel to you? High-level position at another company but your client?)



Their knowledge of and opinion of your overall character



Their communication abilities



The best references can talk about your day-to-day job performance—so when possible, be sure to choose someone who supervised you or someone who worked closely with you.

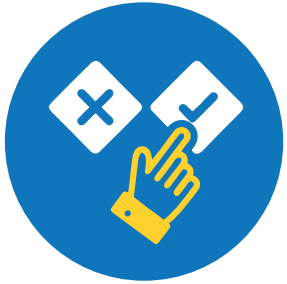


Select someone who knows your work well, and who will be able to speak positively about it. You want someone who has seen you in action and can speak to your abilities. It's better to have someone who can speak to your skills and accomplishments than someone who is just a “big name” on your list of professional references. If someone seems hesitant to serve as your reference, ask someone else.



Tip: Consider relevancy. If you're trying to decide between references, go with the one who can speak best and has the most experience in the industry/type of position you are applying to. If they essentially speak the same language as the prospective employer, that bodes better for you.





If you're fairly new to the job market, or perhaps are heading in an entirely new direction on your career path, you may be struggling to come up with professional references that are a good fit for certain jobs. Maybe you have enough professional references that are the right fit for some jobs, but for others, they just won't be appropriate, able to talk about the right things, or are just in the wrong industry with no crossover.



While using actual professional references is always the preferred option, sometimes you just might find yourself stuck. In this case, you might be better off going with a personal reference who can speak enthusiastically about you than you would be going with a professional reference who is only going to give you a 'meh' review while talking about something completely irrelevant to the job you're applying for.





Personal references can provide a character reference for you, which is something that many hiring managers will care about. A glowing character reference is better than a poor professional reference—though I will say again that if you are far along in your career, you absolutely need to rack your brain and your metaphorical Rolodex before resorting to using personal references.



The main criteria for personal references is that it should not be a relative. A personal reference should know you well, and should have known you for a significant period of time (at least 5 years). Possible personal references include business acquaintances, coaches, neighbors, and community leaders. While personal references may not be able to speak directly to your abilities on the job, they will be able to address things like your overall sense of responsibility, community dedication, people skills, and general commitment to hard work and success. Consider the following for personal/character references:





Professor



Friend/Acquaintance
you've done work for



Leader of a civic
organization



Fellow
volunteer



Acquaintance you've been
in a civic organization with

As you go through your list of potential references, think of it as if this is someone you would send in to interview for the job in your place. Is this someone you can trust to make a good impression? Would you want your potential new employer to sit down with them for a cup of coffee? Or would you be afraid of what your reference might say or let slip during an extended meeting?

Choose references you can be confident in, and choose references you know can be enthusiastic about you.

