

How to Choose and Work with References

Reference checking is an important part of the recruitment process for employers. It is usually the final stage before they offer someone a job. As a job seeker you obviously want to maximize your chances of being offered the job, so having strong references is essential.

Let's take a quick look at why references are important to employers. Referees will:

- Allow the hiring employer to verify what they have learned about the job seeker from their application and interview/s
- Provide an independent assessment of your skills, strengths, and weaknesses
- Enable the employer to make an informed hiring decision

A recent survey by leading staffing service Office Team found that references can 'make or break' a job search.

So what information are employers hoping to get from a reference check? Here is what the same survey found:

- Description of past job duties and experience: 36%
- A view on the person's strengths and weaknesses: 31%
- Confirmation of job title and dates of employment: 11%
- Description of workplace accomplishments: 8%
- A sense of the person's preferred work culture: 7%

How to choose your referees

Referees must be people you know in a work or study capacity (not friends or family members). They could be a previous manager, team leader or supervisor, or someone you did work experience with.

The best referees are people who you have reported to in a previous job, e.g. a line manager. They should be able to comment on your performance in the job (not just dates and job titles). You can match appropriate referees to the job requirements, e.g. those who can provide the most relevant comments and feedback.

If you have limited or no work experience, you could ask a teacher, coach, customer, or someone you have done volunteer work with.

Tip Sheet: REFERENCES

Guidelines on how to work with your referees

- Always seek permission; It is important that your referees want to give you a reference (and will give you a positive one)
- Keep them informed. When you are nearing the end of a job interview process and it is looking promising, give them a 'heads up' when you think they might get a call
- Brief them on the job (so they know what to focus on during the reference check)
- Ask them to focus on your achievements
- Thank them afterwards (especially if you get the job!)

Although reference checks usually happen at the very end of the recruitment process, it is important not to underestimate the importance of having strong, reliable references.

Looking for more support for your job search? Check out our [Resume](#) and [Cover Letter](#) resources.