WHAT IS AN ACADEMIC REFERENCE?

- Academic referees are typically professors.

- An academic reference focuses on academic ability and suitability for program of study. Sometimes students also require academic recommendations when applying for jobs or internships, particularly if the job relates to their academic interests.

IDENTIFYING APPROPRIATE REFERENCES

Below are some criteria to help you in selecting your references.

Think about and assess:

- How well did you do in the professor’s course(s) OR how well did you perform as a Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant?
- How well does the professor know you and/or your work and how up-to-date is that knowledge?
- Will the professor’s reputation carry weight with the selection committee? The opinion of a professor who is well known to a committee is trusted.

Think of courses that you did considerably well in (particularly your upper year courses). In this way, the professor has evidence to address and support your suitability as an effective learner in a more convincing way.

Get to know your professors and create memorable interactions and rapport by demonstrating your interest in learning what they are teaching. Be an active learner and ask thoughtful questions in class. Contribute your ideas and reflections on relevant topics, assignments, presentations, readings or current events and integrating this with course material. Think about how you can use professors’ office hours as an opportunity to build rapport with them (so that they remember you when you request their support as a reference). For example, take the time to familiarize yourself with their research areas and publications. Introduce yourself so the professor knows who you are. Ask questions (about their work) that genuinely interest you. Show curiosity and interest in what you’re learning. Enthusiasm goes a long way. Be positive even if you are having challenges in the course and don’t ask for clues about the exam or whether you have to do the required readings; these are not positive ways to be remembered.

WHEN TO APPROACH YOUR PROFESSORS FOR A REFERENCE?

- Create a list of potential academic referees at least 3 months before the letter is due
- Include extra names on your list (in case some professors are not available or choose not to write)
- Approach your professors in the way that you are accustomed to dealing with them (email or in-office)
- Determine if those professors have reference letter policies (ask about specific directions and follow them).

Reminder: give your academic references as much advance notice as possible. A minimum of 3 months is suggested, preferably longer.

HOW TO APPROACH ACADEMIC REFERENCES

In your initial approach, make sure that each professor:

- knows who you are (introduce yourself; inform them about the program or position that interests you and why; mention the grade you received in their class; and provide a copy of an assignment / paper you wrote for them including their original comments. This should assist them as a memory jogger).
- understands that you are seeking a strong reference;
- know why you would like a letter from them specifically;
- is aware of the letter’s deadline (remember to approach them well in advance of the deadline!).
HOW TO SPEAK TO PROFESSORS

**Be professional:** address your professors by title (eg. Professor or Dr. Green)

**Be clear and concise:** state your request without being overly detailed. Your professors appreciate it when you can articulate your need succinctly.

**Be honest and upfront:** if you are sincere about your intent and approach, the professor will notice this and will respond more in kind to your request.

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR ACADEMIC REFERENCES WITH YOUR REQUEST

Be prepared to provide your referees with information including:

- an updated résumé or CV;
- a draft of any statement of interest or research proposal that will be included in your application;
- any forms that the referee will be asked to fill out (pre-fill what you can in advance of issuing to them);
- your personal contact details (so they can reach you directly if required);
- Any specific instructions such as what the professor should do after completing the letter (eg. does it need to be uploaded to the school’s application site? What is the site? What file format?) Instructions like these will be very helpful to your referee.

- Check in with your referees regarding the letter’s completion 2-3 weeks before the letter is due.

SAMPLE REQUEST FOR A REFERENCE (tailor to your needs):

Hello Professor Green, my name is Rida Pedro. I was a student in your GGR407H5 Eco Hydrology course last semester. I found the content of this course and your teaching style very stimulating and am proud of the A-grade which I received. My positive learning experience in your course has influenced my plan to further my studies and I will be applying for the Master of Science in Geological Sciences program at UBC. I welcome your support in the form of a strong reference letter.

(if your rapport with your professor is not current, consider suggesting an in person chat):

Professor Green, I would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to refresh your memory of me and my class performance, if that would be helpful to you. I will also provide my personal statement, CV and any other documents that you prefer.

(if your professor knows you well, you can be direct with your request):

Professor Green, please let me know if I can rely on your written support. Of course, I would provide you with my personal statement, CV and any other documents that you prefer in preparing the letter.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Sincerely, Rida Pedro

REFERENCES

For more information on asking for an academic reference visit the e-resources below:

- [https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/experience/students/tips-students](https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/experience/students/tips-students) (see section: “How to Approach & Speak to Professors”)
- [www.universityaffairs.ca](http://www.universityaffairs.ca) (go to Career Advice tab and search: how to ask for a reference letter)

Please note that this information is subject to change. It is best to refer to the original sources for the most up to date information. (Created July 2017)