

WHAT IS AN EMPLOYMENT REFERENCE AND HOW DO I IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE REFERENCES?

- An employment or work reference is a person who will be able to positively comment on your work-related skills, abilities, habits or character
- Possible work references (for university students) include former or current supervisors or co-workers at places of work or volunteer activities, professors who know your class or research work, sports coaches, adult friends (not family members) who have known you for a number of years, and anyone who knows you from extra-curricular activities
- If possible, choose references that are most relevant to the position or organization to which you are applying

Positive references can be an important factor in hiring decisions, so consider carefully who you will ask, and take some time to prepare your references (see “How do I ask someone to be a reference for me” below).

HOW MANY REFERENCES DO I NEED?

- Recent graduates looking for full-time employment should try to have three to four references: two work related (paid or unpaid work); one personal and one academic
- Students looking for summer employment should have two to three references: one or two work or volunteer related, and one personal

HOW DO I ASK SOMEONE TO BE A REFERENCE FOR ME?

Once you have decided who you would like to use as a reference, it is important to:

- ask them if they would be able to provide you with a positive reference
- supply them with some information of your own: what types of jobs you are applying for, where you are in your job search process, your key skills and achievements; if you have not worked or interacted with your potential reference for awhile, remind them of any key projects you worked on together or for them, your job duties, or important characteristics that you feel you have demonstrated to them in the past
- provide each reference with a copy of your most current resume
- gather their current contact information (mailing address, phone number, e-mail)
- let your references know when you actually give their names to potential employers (at that time, provide them with the name of the person you gave their contact information to, as well as the position you applied for)
- periodically update your references on your job search progress, and be sure to thank them after you do receive a job offer

WHEN AND IN WHAT FORMAT DO I GIVE MY REFERENCES TO A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER?

- Employers may ask for your references at the conclusion of an interview, or they will contact you after the interview and ask for them at that time
- Do **not** include your references on your resume or send your reference names when you are applying for a job. (You may put the phrase “References available upon request” at the bottom of your resume, but this is optional, as it is understood that employers will ask you for references at some point after an interview)
- Prepare a separate reference sheet which includes your references and their complete contact information. Be sure to take this sheet with you to all interviews, in case you are asked for your references then. If you are not asked at the interview, you will have it ready if you are asked at a later date by the potential employer

SAMPLE REFERENCE SHEET

References

Your name

Your contact information (use the same style used on your resume)

Ms. A. Jones

Head Cashier, ABC Superstore

Mississauga, Ont. L2L 5J4

905-222-3333

ajones@abcsuperstore.ca

Ms. Jones was my supervisor at ABC Superstore

Professor N. Larkin, Philosophy

University of Toronto Mississauga

3359 Mississauga Rd.,

Mississauga, Ont. L5L 1C6

905-569-3333

nlarking@utoronto.ca

Prof. Larkin taught me 4th year philosophy

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER MIGHT ASK A REFERENCE

- Please describe how you know the candidate, and for how long.
- What are some of the candidate's key strengths? Are there any things that you think they need to work on?
- Please describe the candidate's skills in the area of communication.
- How effective is the candidate in dealing with customers? Can you give me an example?
- Please describe how well the candidate works as part of a team.
- How well does the candidate receive feedback?
- Please describe the candidate's organizational skills.
- Was the candidate always present and punctual?
- Would you hire this candidate again?
- Do you have any additional information or comments about this candidate?

WHAT ABOUT REFERENCE LETTERS?

- Although most employers will not ask for reference letters, you can attach them to your reference sheet if you have one or two that are relevant.
- When you leave a job, you might consider asking for a reference letter from a supervisor, in case you are not able to contact that individual later on when you need to use them as a reference.

ACADEMIC REFERENCES

- An academic reference focuses on academic ability and suitability for program of study
- A professor or other academic supervisor typically provides a reference in a letter form
- For more information on asking for this type of reference please see the tip sheet: [Academic References](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES IN THE UTM CAREER CENTRE

- Susan Britton Whitcomb (2003). *Resume Magic*. (pg. 498 as related to References)
- *Resume and Cover letter* binder, "General" category (last section entitled "References")
- Martin, Carole (2005). *Perfect Phrases for the Perfect Interview* (pg. 130 for answering references related questions during interview)

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. (Updated May 2017)