

UTM CAREER CENTRE TIPSHEETS:

Academic References



WHAT IS AN ACADEMIC REFERENCE?

- 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.
- Academic referees typically include professors.

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.

HOW TO GET TO KNOW YOUR PROFESSORS & GET THEM TO KNOW YOU:

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 your 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. 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;
- knows 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!**).