



# References: What's In A Name?

Requesting others to back up your name with theirs.

## What, references, too?

Why has the employer requested references from you? Weren't your compelling cover letter and impressive résumé sufficient for the job?

Basically, references are contacts that 1) support and verify your résumé; and 2) whose written or oral feedback creates a more in-depth picture of you as a candidate. Hiring and training involves time and money. Therefore, employers want to know as much as they can before they "buy."

Enter the reference. How better to learn more than to interview people who know you? Usually this means acquaintances and former employers. With nearly 50% of résumés containing inaccuracies or untruths, employers want to know you are who you say you are, and that you can indeed fulfill the duties of the position once hired. Questions can include the degree and duration of acquaintance with you, and in what capacity; your work skills and ethics, attendance and reliability; how well you handle pressure; your strengths/weaknesses, character, potential fit, communication and team skills, salary, reason for leaving, and more.

While some argue the validity of references that are slanted in your favor, over 80% of employers will check references to varying degrees, depending upon the job. Temporary or part-time jobs, perhaps less. Conversely, expect candidates for banking and government jobs to be highly scrutinized, often with background checks that detail work history, military career, and criminal record.

## Reference flavors.

There are primarily two types of job references: employment and character. The first is more formal and attests to your work experience and skills. If written, company letterhead with a signature are ideal. Employment references are generally objective. Some companies limit references to start and end dates of employment, and salary only. This minimizes their exposure to potential discrimination suits in the event of a no-hire. As entry-level talent, you may not have extensive professional references from former employers.

Character references focus more on you as a person: Your personality, traits, and values, *i.e.*, how well you may fit in. Intended to make you look good, they can be from faculty, counselors, mentors, community leaders, internships, and volunteer work. Avoid relatives. Together, both types confirm your skills and capabilities, and whether or not you "play well with others."

## Know these reference points.

Start with the basics:

- expect to provide three to five real references; don't fabricate names;
- choose references wisely; make sure you'll receive nothing but a positive review; be prepared for no's; any uncertainty, ask someone else;
- get permission before including a reference; otherwise, notify them asap that they may be contacted; no one likes a pop quiz;
- provide copies of your résumé and job details to references so they can speak and/or write knowledgeably to the recruiter on your behalf;
- list references separately on stationery that matches your résumé, never on the résumé; include your name at the top;
- verify spelling and contact details: full name, title, company address, phone (day/evening/cell), email;
- current references are ideal; but going back five years is acceptable;
- finally, THANK your references with a note; it's professional and courteous.

Note: Employers can interview *anyone*, even people *not* on your list. They may, however, interview current instructors and employers only with your permission.

Don't minimize the importance of a good reference: It may be just what's needed to tip the scales in your favor.



## i n a nutshell:

Reference these reference factors:

- **Never list references on résumés; provide only if requested**
- **Always obtain permission to include references; no relatives**
- **Select names strategically; positive references only**
- **Avoid "References available upon request"; it's understood**
- **Employers can interview people not even on your list**
- **Employers also search social media, so watch what you post**
- **Have references handy for interviews; no fumbling**
- **THANK your references**

Top off your job seeking material with candidacy confirming connections.