



## Choosing References

Prospective employers use the process of checking references as a method to validate your skills and abilities for a particular position. The employer's goal when contacting one of your references is to gain some additional insight about your work ethics and capabilities. Your job in obtaining references is to make sure that the individuals you choose project the very best impression of your attributes and abilities.

### Basic Guidelines

- ♦ Identify potential individuals to use as references early in your college career. Get to know your professors and advisors and let them get to know you. Impress them!
- ♦ Do not offer anyone's name as a reference unless you have that person's explicit permission to do so.
- ♦ Your potential list of references should include a balance of academic, employer and personal references.
- ♦ Plan to acquire at least three to five references. If you are applying for several different positions you may need to decide which references best support your abilities for the position to which you are applying and eliminate those who can offer little testimony of your qualifications.
- ♦ Do not ask someone to serve as a reference for you if you are not confident in their ability to write or respond positively in a timely manner to a prospective employer about your abilities.
- ♦ If you are currently employed, do not use your current employer on your list of initial references. Your current employer should serve to confirm your abilities at the time of an employment offer. Let your other references get you to that point.

- ♦ Do not list references on your résumé. Only include a reference page if it has been requested.
- ♦ Employers will vary in their requirements regarding the number and type of references you provide, as well as when reference information is requested. Pay attention to specific employer protocols.

### Asking Someone to Serve as a Reference

- ♦ Ask for permission. For example, "Would you be willing to serve as a reference for me as I pursue my job search?"
- ♦ Tell them why you want them to be one of your references. Emphasize what they know about your skills and abilities.
- ♦ Share with them what career path you are pursuing and what information you feel would be valuable for them to share with a prospective employer.
- ♦ Inform them of when you need the reference. Give them adequate time to write a letter of recommendation, preferably two weeks. Keep in mind that you may need letters of recommendation at the time you apply for a position or they may be requested at a later time during the employment process. If you are asking the individual to mail a letter of recommendation, be sure to provide

him or her with a self-addressed envelope or a correct e-mail address.

- ◆ When possible, provide your reference contact with a description of the job for which you are applying and how you feel you meet or exceed that criteria. Make sure your references know what you expect from their recommendation; for example, insight into your professional growth in a certain area.
- ◆ Thank them. A definite word of thanks and a written note is the correct follow-up.
- ◆ Keep your references posted throughout your employment process. A call from a prospective employer should not be a surprise to any of your references. It should be expected so they are adequately prepared to respond with facts and specific examples about your abilities. Be sure to let them know your final destination or whether you are still actively in the job search process.
- ◆ Make sure your references know if you have had a name change since your affiliation with them.

### **Reference Page Guidelines**

- ◆ Make sure contact information for each reference is correct.
- ◆ Use a separate page for references.
- ◆ Format your reference page to match your résumé. Include your personal information (i.e. name, address, phone, and e-mail) at the top of your reference page and treat “References” as a heading.

- ◆ When providing reference information, include:

- Name of Reference
- Position Title
- Company Affiliation
- Company Address
- Business Phone and Extension
- E-Mail Address (if used)

### **Another Way to Use References**

If you are in the final rounds of an interview process and references have not been contacted at this point, ask one of your references to contact the prospective employer on your behalf to validate your qualifications for the position.