

## Reference Lists

References are an important part of the job search process. When you're selected for an interview, and the interview leads to increased interest, employers will typically want to check your references. In some cases, a reference check could be the deciding factor in an employer choosing between two or more final candidates.

Essentially, references are those individuals who know you well. They are also someone who can comment on your performance as a worker, and on your qualities and characteristics as a person. References need to be individuals who can "back-up" what you said about yourself in the interview process. This consistency of message – from you and your references – can make a big difference with an employer.

Below you will find some advice on how to choose and list your references:

- Ideally, a typical job seeker should have three to five references on their reference list. Those seeking more senior level positions should consider listing five to seven references.  
  
It's better to have more references than you need. In this way, when asked for references you can strategically choose the best people to speak on your behalf based on the specific opportunity.
- Carefully choose those individuals who can speak directly and positively about your work performance, skills, abilities, qualities and/or characteristics.
- Work (job and internship) references are highly valued. Consider those who have previously supervised your work, and/or those who you have worked closely with. For current students and recent alumni, professors, mentors, club advisors and/or coaches would be appropriate. If you volunteer your time for an organization, the volunteer supervisor may also be someone you could use.
- Do not use family, friends or neighbors as references. They are too close and may be viewed as biased.
- Always ask permission to use someone as a reference, prior to putting them on your reference list. If they agree, consider asking them what they would say when contacted by an employer. This will give you an indication of how good of a reference they may be. It will also give you an indication of what they will "back-up."

- Get all of the appropriate information from each reference for your reference list, including full name, current title, organization, street/ mailing address, daytime phone number, and an email address.
- Provide each reference with a copy of your updated resume, a statement of your career goals, and any other information they may need to know. This will help them customize their comments in a way that is fully supportive of your candidacy for relevant positions.
- Keep references updated on your job/internship search. Let them know when they can expect to be contacted by prospective employers. This will help them anticipate a call, as well as prepare for it.
- References should never be listed on your resume. They belong on a separate document that matches the look and feel of your resume. See our sample format on page two of this handout.
- List your references from most important to least important. If you had five references on your list, and an employer were to only contact the first three, who would you want them to contact?
- Do not provide references to an employer until they are specifically requested. References are “precious resources,” so treat them as such.
- Once your current job/internship search is complete, make sure to reach out to your references to share the news and thank them for their time, assistance and support.

## EXACT HEADING FROM YOUR RESUME

### PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES

Mr./Ms./Dr. First Name Last Name  
Their Job Title  
Name of Organization  
Business Street/Mailing Address, City, State, Zip Code  
Phone Number (including area code)  
Email Address

**Relationship:** Describe the relationship of the reference to you. For example, “Ms. Smith served as my supervisor at ABC Company and, as a result, can comment on my overall performance in the XYZ position that I held there. You may also want to include a project that you worked on together, or skill sets that this person can attest to.

Mr./Ms./Dr. First Name Last Name  
Their Job Title  
Name of Organization  
Business Street/Mailing Address, City, State, Zip Code  
Phone Number (including area code)  
Email Address

**Relationship:** Describe the relationship of the reference to you. For example, “Ms. Smith served as my supervisor at ABC Company and, as a result, can comment on my overall performance in the XYZ position that I held there. You may also want to include a project that you worked on together, or skill sets that this person can attest to.

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