

## REFERENCES

Many prospective employers will ask you for a list of references when applying for a position. References are professional or academic contacts that are able and willing to speak highly of your skills and capabilities. They can include law school or other professors, former job supervisors, or other professionals with whom you have personal relationships or know through participation in volunteer and other activities.

**References v. Letters of Recommendation.** When references are requested, an employer will expect a simple list of names and contact information for individuals who can speak about your abilities as a potential employee if and when contacted. By contrast, a letter of recommendation is an actual letter written by an individual – who may very well also be one of your references – to a particular employer discussing why she recommends you for a particular position.

Here are some tips to facilitate the process of obtaining references and ensuring that they are equipped to make the best possible case for you:

**Line up your references early.** Because you need to seek permission from all of your references before you can list them, you should start thinking about who you want to ask as soon as possible.

**Give your references the information they need to be effective.**

- Provide them with:
  - A list of the positions or types of positions for which you will be using them as a reference
  - An updated copy of your resume
  - An updated copy of your transcript
  - A copy of your cover letter (so they can tailor their comments to the specific employer)
- In addition, for academic references provide:
  - A list of the courses you have taken with them
  - A description of tasks completed as a research or teaching assistant
  - Copies of any papers you wrote for class (save papers written for professors you may want to use as references in the future!)
- For employer references also provide:
  - A detailed list of the tasks you performed in the position you held
  - Examples of your performance that illustrate important skills or qualities
  - The exact dates when you were employed by them
- When requesting a letter of recommendation, give the recommender:

- Clear instructions on where to send the letter
- The date by which it must either be postmarked or arrive
- Where appropriate, a pre-addressed and stamped envelope
- Plenty of time to prepare the letter – ask as far in advance as possible (1-2 months) and send an email reminder two weeks before the letter is due

**More recent references are preferable to earlier ones.** For example, law school professors are better references than your undergraduate professors.

**Pick people who know you well and can speak about you personally.** Don't be tempted to ask a senior or well-known person to be a reference on that basis alone. Choose individuals who know your work product, not just your personality.

**Let your references know when you have submitted their names to an employer.** That way they will be "on alert" when the employer contacts them.

**Be aware that some employers have a policy against giving references and will only verify dates of employment.** If that is the case, you must find someone else.

**If a past employer has given you a glowing written recommendation, it is fine to include the letter when sending references, even if not specifically requested.** But don't go overboard with a huge stack of letters.

**References should not be included on your resume.** Do not write "References provided upon request" on your resume. Submit a separate list of references in response to a job posting that specifically requests this.

**Thank your references and keep them updated on your job search.** Don't forget to share any good news!

**Sample Reference List** (If it is unclear from the job title what your connection is to each reference, provide a brief explanation)

**STUDENT NAME**

123 Dogwood Street, NW • Washington, DC 12345 • (202) 123-4567 •  
lawstudent@law.gwu.edu

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**REFERENCES**

Mary Smith  
Staff Attorney  
U.S. Department of Energy - Energy Information Administration  
Washington, DC  
(202) 555-5555  
*Former supervisor*

Professor John Doe  
Constitutional Law  
The George Washington University Law School  
Washington, DC  
(202) 555-5555  
*Former law professor*

John Johnson  
Vice President of Operations  
The Fir Company  
Boston, Massachusetts  
(617) 555-5555  
*Personal reference*