



Asking for a Reference

Are your references in order? The following steps will walk you through the process of asking for a letter of recommendation (usually required for graduate school) and for a job reference (sometimes required for internship or job applications).

Letters of Recommendations

(Requested for graduate school, scholarships, etc.)

Build a relationship before requesting a letter. Individuals are more likely to write a letter (and a *better* letter) for someone they know!

- For professors, attend their classes and office hours or join their research labs.
- Share your career goals during the conversations!
- Employers can also be good sources for letters.

Don't wait until the last minute! Ask two months ahead of time *at the latest!* Letter writers will be more willing and will be able to produce a better product if they have more time!

The ask:

- If you are having trouble broaching the subject, ask if the person attended graduate school or has any advice in applying for a job or award. They may ask you questions about your own plans and even offer themselves!
- Meet with them multiple times: if time permits, use the first meeting to share career goals. Asking for the reference can come later.
- "Would you be willing to write my letter of recommendation? I would like it if someone who knows me well would write one of my letters."

Who should I ask? Graduate school applications typically require three letters of recommendation.

- Have at least one professor who can attest to your academic performance.
- If applying to a PhD program, it is recommended to have someone from a research background write your letter, such as your lab leader or primary investigator.
- Your past employer could be a good candidate because he/she can attest to related experience and skills.
- If applying for an award or job, consider asking someone in a relevant field.

Should I give my references anything?

- Share your application materials (e.g., personal statement and CV/resume) with your references so they can see all of your experiences.
- Share information about the program you are applying to (i.e. what is their mission statement, what kind of student are they looking for).
- Some letter writers will ask *you* to draft the letter for them, so be prepared.
- Share instructions and materials for submitting. This makes it easier for your letter writer to submit the letters (i.e. inform them of the process and where to submit, provide them with envelopes and other fees if necessary).
- Don't forget to express your gratitude to those who write your letter after the letters have been submitted!

Reference Sheet Tips

(Requested for job seekers)

- Submit professional references only, unless otherwise noted.
- Reference sheets should **NOT** be submitted with the initial résumé and cover letter, unless requested by the employer. Otherwise take a copy of the reference sheet with you to the interview.
- The typical number of references listed is three to five.
- Have a mix of professional and academic references.
- Prior to listing references, ask permission of the individual whose name you wish to use.
- Provide your references with a copy of your résumé so that they have a more thorough idea of your background.
- Also, keep your references apprised of your progress, and be sure to let them know when you have an interview so they can be prepared for the call.
- Thank your references for their help and let them know when you are successful.



Reference Sheet Tips

(For job seekers)

Reference types

Some employers request references when applying for internship or job positions. Make sure you recruit the correct professional to serve as a reference by reviewing the types below.

- **Professional Reference:** a professional, who is not related to you, and has supervised your work. The professional should be able to share examples of your work abilities. **This type of reference is most often required by employers** and the applicant can choose who they list as references to be called by the employer. Examples: a manager, volunteer coordinator, internship supervisor, sports coach, professor.
- **Personal reference:** someone who is not related to you but has known you for an extended period of time and could speak to your personal characteristics. Examples: a neighbor, community organizer, family friend.
- **Employment verification:** some applications will list a place for contact information for every organization you have worked at (i.e. USAJobs is a very notable example). This practice is used to identify a point person so the employer can confirm employment history, only. If your past supervisor is no longer employed at the organization, consider adding the human resource number in this situation as they should be able to confirm employment dates and titles.

Creating a reference sheet

- Create a reference document using the same font size/type and margins as your résumé. Do not include references on your resume.
- Your header (name/contact information) on the reference sheet should match the header on your résumé.
- Submit your reference sheet with your résumé and cover letter, if requested by the employer. Otherwise take a copy of the reference sheet with you to the interview.
- It is best to have a mix of professional and academic references.
- Provide your references with a copy of your résumé so that they have a more thorough idea of your background.
- Consider adding a statement describing how you know the professional (example listed below beside the “*”).

Tips to obtaining great references

- Choose a professional that you have worked with in some way who can provide detailed information about you and your skills.
- References related to your field of interest may be important to consider. List a mix of professional and academic references.
- The typical number of references cited is three to five.
- Prior to listing references, ask permission of the individual whose name you wish to use.
- It is crucial that you follow all of the employer's instructions, because some internship sites may request actual recommendation letters in lieu of a reference list.

How do I request references?

- Provide your references with a copy of your résumé so that they have a more thorough idea of your background.
- Keep your references in the know! Let them know when you accept an interview so they can be prepared for the reference call. Also, thank them for their help, when you accept an offer. After all, you may want to call upon them for a reference in the future.

The ask:

- “I have really enjoyed working with you at xyz, I was wondering if you would serve as a positive reference for my current internship search? Thank you! I will send you a copy of my resume for your files and I will alert you to potential calls after each interview. Thank you again for all of your help and support.”



Reference Sheet Example

OLIVIA K. SMITH

12345 South Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19131
215.222.3333
oksmith125@umd.edu

Dr. Alex Cline, Professor, University of Maryland
2130 Skinner Building
College Park, MD 20742
301.314.0000
acline@umd.edu
*Supervisor at the Helping Hearts Lab.

Ms. Amy Watts, Assistant Director, Orientation Office, University of Maryland
1102 Cole Field House
College Park, MD 20742
301.000.0000
awatts@umd.edu
*Supervised me as an Orientation Leader.

Mr. Ace Collins, Volunteer Coordinator, Helping Hands
5142 Slate Avenue
College Park, MD 20742
546-000-0000
acecollins@helpinghands.net
*Oversaw my volunteer work at Hand by Hand.