

# Referees

## Who can they be and how many do I need?

### Who is a referee?

A referee is an individual who can vouch for what you are like as a person and/or your performance, skills and personality in the work setting.

### Number of referees

Most Australian employers will expect each application to have two referees; some may only require one; others four.

### What if your referees are international?

Many international students may have referees from their home country. These referees can be useful, but remember that most Australian Employers will also expect to see at least one Australian based referee. If you are planning to gain experience in Australia, it may assist you to gain some local referees.

### When will a referee be contacted?

Your referees will usually be contacted after you have attended an interview.

### Types of Referees

#### Professional referee

This individual must have experience working with you, preferably supervising you in a workplace setting. This includes individuals from part time, voluntary and casual experience regardless of Industry. Professional referees include:

- Your current or previous supervisor/manager, (some applications require current supervisor, otherwise use your preference)
- a colleague who was senior to you and conducted at least one project with you.

#### Character referee

A character referee is common for students and recent graduates to use, when you may have minimal professional experience, however these individuals should be able to vouch for your skills and attributes.

Example:

- someone you have worked with, but was not your supervisor,
- a president of a student club or society,
- a professional that you may have had contact with over a period of time, a professional that has known

you for at least several years (your parents' co-workers or family friends).

### How do I list a University Academic?

Your course coordinator/lecturer/tutor or supervisor has worked with you in different ways with a different level of understanding of your skills. In most cases University staff would probably be listed as a character referee.

### Who is an inappropriate referee?

- Any professional you have worked with that could not speak more than 5 minutes about you
- Anyone who struggles to remember who you are (not a great first impression for a recruiter)
- A referee who in the past may have been appropriate, but for whatever reason no longer is, as they have:
  - a lack of understanding of your industry or role
  - out of date contact details - unable to track down
  - lack relevance as you have more current referees who are more relevant for the roles applying for
- Family members (unless working for a family owned business)
- Friends or colleagues of the same level as you

### How will a referee be contacted?

In most cases your potential employer would like to move through this as quickly as possible, so that they can advise candidates in an acceptable time frame of the outcome of their interview. Therefore the recruiter will usually email or telephone the employer with the contact details you provided in your application.

### What will a referee be asked?

Some organisations have a standard set of questions for all potential employees, others create a list of questions which will help them identify if you will be a good fit in the role and company. Referees are also used to clarify/confirm your responses and aspects of your application.

The recruiter will generally explain a bit about the role that you have applied for, then ask a series of questions.

#### Common questions:

- What was the role of the referee when they worked with you
- How long have you worked for the organisation? This question is to verify the dates you have provided.

- What type of work did the candidate do, when and for what duration
- Strengths and weakness of candidate
- How did the candidate perform with regard to (something relevant to the role you are applying for)?
- A question relating to team work/projects/time management
- If they would hire you again

As you can see, these questions are quite similar to basic interview questions and most referees are quite experienced in responding. The best way to ensure you receive a good reference is by maintaining a relationship with your referee and giving them updates on your development. It's important to know they are as confident about your skills as you are, so always be on the lookout for a new potential referee who cares about you and your career progress!

## Length of references

Telephone references can range from 5 – 45 minute conversations. All organisations and hiring managers have their own process.

5 – 10 questions are common and can end with a conversation – similar to the process you went through in the Interview.

Some organisations also email their questions to referees both for efficiency and documentation. There will usually be the same amount of questions as a telephone reference, and the response can take 10 – 45 minutes depending on how much time your referee has available and is able to write about you.

## How do I select a referee?

Choosing the right referees is as important as tailoring your resume to the position. When choosing someone to be your referee, think about people who can say good things about you to potential employers.

## How do I ask someone if they would like to be my referee?

- Ask outright. "I am looking at applying for a few internships at places like .... /or where I can work in .... / or get some exposure in .... industry ....., would it be possible to list you as a referee?"
- Send an email or message on LinkedIn:

*Hello \_\_\_\_\_,*

*I'm currently in the process of updating my resume as I would like to apply for the upcoming Graduate Programs, particularly with companies such as and/ or roles such as \_\_\_\_\_. (say something about your involvement with them current or past) I really*

*enjoyed working with your team last semester, the opportunity to gain some voluntary work while giving back to the community was such a great experience. I'm getting in touch because I would like to ask if you would be happy to provide a reference for me?*

*Kind regards,*

If they respond positively send them a thank you or give them a call to touch base and reconnect. Take the opportunity during the conversation to 'drop in' some of the things you have worked on or experiences you have gained outside of their knowledge.

Most people say yes when asked if they would like to be a referee, however everyone should be mindful of the level of contact they have had with you. If they say no, it may be because they believe they would not be qualified to respond to the questions in detail.

## How often should I be in contact with my referees?

Your referees should be aware if you are actively seeking a new opportunity, or at the latest when you are offered an interview. If you are applying for multiple roles (Grad Programs), let them know so they are aware they may receive reference requests over a few months. If your referee is fully up to date with your progress – an email or a text after an interview would be a polite notification that they may get a call.

Your referees must be aware of your recent skill level and experience. One of your best advocates may be from a supervisor from when you were a student, however you will grow significantly professionally in the next five years, and no referee is a mind reader!

Take with developing your ability to sell your skills, experiences and qualities to your advocate through regular updates. Selling our skills and abilities in an interview can be challenging. This is a skill developed over time. Use these conversations with referees as your training. You can speak honestly, and passionately on the work and skills you have achieved and the direction you are going in and why.

If you require a written reference for future employment (common in some countries), please state this when asking someone to be your referee.

## Do you have more questions or concerns regarding referees?

Make an appointment with one of the Career Advisors to discuss your situation.

## For further details, please contact:

### Career Development Learning

Student Enrichment and Employability Development  
careers@uq.edu.au  
employability.uq.edu.au/find-a-job



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