

Referees

Who can they be and how many do I need?

Who is a referee?

A referee is someone who can comment on your skills, performance, work habits and suitability for an opportunity based on their direct experience working with you.

How many referees do I need?

Most applications request two referees. Some opportunities may ask for one referee, while others may request up to four.

How do I select a referee?

Choose referees who:

- Know your work well as they have supervised or worked closely with you
- Can provide recent examples of your skills
- Can comment on your suitability for the opportunity

What types of referees can I use?

Professional referees are preferred for most applications. Character referees are generally best used when you have

Professional referee examples:

- Current or previous supervisor
- Placement supervisor
- Team leader or project coordinator
- Colleague who has worked closely with you

Character referee examples:

- Club or society president
- Volunteer coordinator
- Long-term professional acquaintance
- Community leader

What if my referees are international?

International referees are often acceptable. Some Australian employers may prefer at least one Australian-based referee who can comment on your work in an Australian context. If you are planning to work in Australia, consider developing local referees through employment, volunteering, placements or practical experiences.

How do I list a university academic?

University academics can be suitable referees if they know you and your work well through:

- Research projects or honours supervision
- Tutoring
- Extended coursework interactions

If your interaction was limited to attending lectures or tutorials, they may not be able to provide a strong reference and may be better suited as a character referee.

Tip: If you are considering an academic as a referee, try to build your relationship before you need a reference by attending consultations, seeking feedback and engaging in research or project opportunities.

Who is not an appropriate referee?

- Someone who would not be able to provide a detailed or positive reference about you and your work
- Family members (unless working for a family owned business)
- Friends or colleagues who have not supervised your work
- A referee who in the past may have been appropriate but is now no longer appropriate because they:
 - have a lack of understanding of the industry or the role you are applying for
 - have out of date contact details or are unable to track down
 - are no longer the most relevant referee because you have more recent or role-relevant referees available

Do I need a written reference?

In some countries or industries, employers may request a written reference. Discuss this with your referee when you ask them to support your applications.

How do I ask someone to be my referee?

Always ask before listing someone as a referee. You can ask them in person, by phone or by email. When asking, explain:

- The role or opportunity you are applying for
- Why you are asking them specifically
- The skills, experiences or achievements you would like them to comment on
- When they could expect to be contacted

Example text for an email request:

Hello [Name],

I hope you have been well.

I am currently applying for opportunities such as [role/program names], including positions with organisations such as [organisation names]. I really enjoyed [working with your team last semester / completing my placement with you / volunteering with your organisation] and greatly valued the experience. Through this experience, I developed skills in [relevant skill or area], and I believe you would be able to provide valuable insight into my capabilities and suitability. I am getting in touch to ask whether you would be comfortable acting as a referee for me.

Thank you for considering my request. I would be happy to provide any additional information about the opportunities I am applying for.

Kind regards,

[Your Name]

After they agree to be a referee, thank them for their support. You can also:

- Provide information about their role, course or opportunity
- Share your resume and any relevant application materials
- Let them know if your contact details or circumstances change
- Keep them updated on the outcome of your applications via LinkedIn or another professional platform

How are reference checks conducted?

Employers usually conduct reference checks after an interview or later in the selection process. They may contact referees by phone, email or an online form and usually ask questions about your skills, experience and suitability for the role.

What questions will a referee be asked?

Common topics may include questions about: your relationship with the referee and how long the referee has known or supervised you. They may also be asked questions about:

- Your responsibilities and achievements
- Your strengths and areas for development
- Your communication and teamwork skills
- Your suitability for the role, course or opportunity
- Whether they would work with or recommend you again

These questions are often similar to interview questions and most referees are familiar with responding to them. Keeping your referees informed of your progress can help them provide relevant and detailed recommendations.

How often should I be in contact with my referees?

Referees who understand your current skills, experiences and career goals are often better able to provide relevant and detailed recommendations. Keep them informed when:

- You apply for a significant role, course or opportunity
- You list them as a referee
- You are invited to an interview
- You receive an offer or accept the role

You can also maintain the relationship by sharing career achievements and milestones or updating them on new skills and experiences via LinkedIn or another professional platform.

For further details, please contact:

Career Development

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