

REFERENCES

References are the people in your personal and professional network willing to speak to your qualifications and character to potential employers or graduate/professional school programs. You will want to identify three to five people you want to serve as references and then determine their willingness and availability to serve as a positive reference.

This Tip Sheet will walk you through choosing references, how to build a reference page to accompany your resume and cover letter as well as content you want included in an effective reference letter.

CHOOSING YOUR REFERENCES

Identify people who will speak highly of your past work performance (job, class work, research, etc.):

- Past or present employers
- Instructors, advisors, coaches
- Professional business leaders in your community, etc.

Colleagues/peers are appropriate if you worked on a team project together. Character/personal references should only be provided if requested or if your choices are limited. Always ask references if they have time to serve as a positive reference.

EDUCATING YOUR REFERENCES

- Provide a copy of your resume to your references so they may speak intelligently about your past experiences.
- Inform them of the kind of positions you are seeking.
- Coach them about the skills and strengths you would like them to emphasize.
- Notify them of positions for which you apply so they may anticipate a call.
- Thank references and notify them when you accept a job.

DON'T EVER...

- List individuals you have not contacted
- Assume individuals will know who you are
- List individuals whom you have had a negative experience
- Fabricate individuals' names
- List contact information that is not current or incomplete

REFERENCE PAGE

- The reference page is a separate document that you provide to an employer along with your resume and cover letter.
- The reference page should mirror your resume in design.
- Consider asking each reference to submit a brief (1 - 2 sentences) statement endorsing you as a fit for the position.

REFERENCE PAGE INFORMATION:

You will need to confirm correct spelling with each reference. Also, make sure that you identify what contact information they want to use as it may be different from what you use to communicate with him or her.

- Complete name and title (using Mr., Miss, Mrs., Ms. or Dr.)
- Job title
- Name of organization
- Address (work or home)
- Phone number (work or home)
- Email address (professional or personal)

Please see reference page sample on p. 2.

REFERENCE LETTERS

An employer (not as often) or graduate/professional program may request a reference letter. This letter communicates that you are a fit for the position and company. The letter should include the following:

- Job title held and dates of employment (if applicable)
- Relationship of the writer to you
- Responsibilities (if applicable) observed
- Work ethic
- Achievements and accomplishments
- Personal endorsement of character
- Abilities and skills

If someone is taking the time to write your letter of reference, you should provide them with the following:

- Self-addressed, stamped envelope with the employer's name and address typed on the front
- Copy of your resume
- Copy of the job description
- Summary of your skills, experience and accomplishments as they relate to the position
- Thank you note

Please see reference letter content sample on p. 2 and consider sharing this resource with your references writing your letter.



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REFERENCE PAGE SAMPLE

IMA RACER

123 Smart Street | Murray, KY 42071
(270) 000-0000 | raceri@murraystate.edu

REFERENCES

Mrs. Jane Doe

Advisor
The Murray Ledger
1001 Whitnell Ave.
Murray, KY 42071
janedoe@murrayledger.com
270.753.0000

Mr. John Smith

Director
Happy Summer Camp
1212 Plaza
Small Town, OH 12345
j_smith@happycamp.org
111.111.1111

Dr. Sunny Shine

Professor
English Department
Haley Center
Murray State University, KY 42071
sshine1@murraystate.edu
270.809.1234

REFERENCE LETTER FORMAT

Reference Letterhead

Date

FirstName LastName

Title

Organization/Company

1234 School Road

School, KY 00000

Dear Mr. LastName:

The first paragraph should explain your connection to the student being recommended, including why you are qualified to write this letter as regards to a job or graduation/professional school.

The next paragraph (or two) should outline specific information about the student, including why he/she is qualified, what he/she can contribute, and why you are providing a reference letter. If necessary, use more than one paragraph to communicate how the student's skills match the position for which he/she is applying. (The student should provide a copy of his/her resume and the job description/graduate program outline.)

Summarize your comfort level with recommending the student ("highly recommend," "recommend without reservation," etc.) You may also want to briefly touch on areas where you have seen growth to personalize the letter.

Conclude the letter by providing your contact information (phone number and/or email address) and your willingness to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

FirstName LastName

Title