



How to Handle your Professional References

In the past, résumés typically included a closing statement such as, “References Available Upon Request.” This statement has become rather passé. What is more important is to have your reference information readily available at all times. Savvy job seekers now have a professionally prepared reference list to take with them to job interviews and present to employers when the time is appropriate.

The first step to creating a professional reference list is to decide whom you would like to use as your professional references and ask their permission. **I recommend choosing three to five people.** The idea is to choose people who can provide a “testimonial” about your work experience, skills, and contributions, so choose a variety of professional relationships.

Normally, it is good to include in your mix a current or previous supervisor; a co-worker; someone you supervised (if appropriate); someone from another department that you collaborated with on a project or served with on a committee; perhaps a client or customer. Do not include relatives and only include personal contacts if they can say something about your work habits.

Once you have **selected your references** and **obtained their permission** to use them, ask if they prefer to be contacted at work or at home (this will help you know what information to include on your reference list.) **Also, make sure you give each reference a copy of your résumé and discuss with them the type of jobs you are seeking.**

The following information is normally included for each of your references:

- Name
- Occupation
- Address (work or home)
- Phone number (work, cell or home)
- E-mail address (work or personal)
- One or two lines that explains your relationship and how long you have known each other.

Create your reference list by typing this information on your professional letterhead and formatting it to match your résumé font and margins.

Do not mail your reference list with your résumé, unless specifically requested by the employer. Instead take a copy with you (printed on résumé paper) to the interview. You will need the information when you complete your job application. You also want to offer a copy to the employer at the conclusion of the interview. This will help you in determining his interest and the next step.

After each interview, make sure you call or e-mail each of your references to give them a “heads-up” that an employer may be calling them and share with them some of the highlights you and the employer discussed during the interview. When the employer takes the time to phone or e-mail one of your references, this means you are being considered for employment— and this is exciting news!

Choose and groom your references wisely and keep them in the information loop. A good reference can help you-a bad one can hurt you!