



**RICHARD M. FAIRBANKS**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# References and Letters of Recommendation

References and letters of recommendation are essential parts of any application process. Typically, references will be requested for most employment opportunities, while letters of recommendation will be needed for academic pursuits, such as teaching and research positions, graduate school, or professional school. However, there are always exceptions to the rule, so be sure to always carefully read the application instructions.

## REFERENCES

When an employer asks you to provide references they are asking for a list of contact information for three to five people who can speak to your abilities. It is important that these people all know you in some professional capacity. It is not acceptable to list family or close friends as references. Your references could include: previous employers, past managers, internship supervisors, volunteer supervisors, co-workers (typically someone more senior to you), or faculty members. It is always important to ask permission before listing someone as a reference. It is also important to keep your references well informed. Provide them with a copy of your résumé. You will also want to let them know about the positions you are applying for and the organizations that may be calling them. By providing them with this key information, they are able to provide a stronger recommendation on your behalf. Be sure to thank your references at the end of your job/internship search!

## FORMAT

References should always be submitted as a separate sheet. The only exception to this is if a Curricula Vitae (CV) has been requested. References are built in to the CV and, therefore, will not require a separate sheet. Take the header that you used on your résumé and place it across the top of your reference sheet. Be sure to use the same font that you used on your résumé and cover letter as well. If submitting your references in person (e.g. during an interview), be sure to print your references on the same quality résumé paper that your résumé was printed on. It is important that all of your application materials (résumé, cover letter and references) match. For each reference, include the following information: name, title, organization, work address, office phone number, and e-mail address. List your references either in order of relevance to the position or in alphabetical order.

## TIMING

Only provide your references to an employer when the employer asks for them. If the employer asks for your references as part of the initial application process, be sure to include them. If your references are not specifically asked for at the beginning of the process, it is best to hold onto your references and wait until they are requested of you. This helps you in two ways: (1) it lets you know that you are still being considered for the position when you receive the reference

### JACKSON SMITH

jsmith@gmail.com (555) 555-5555  
441 Sunset Rd. Ely, MN 55731

#### REFERENCES

**Mr. William Darcy**  
*Marketing Director*  
Rosebud Village  
3498 Wellness Ln.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
(555)555-5555  
wdarchy@rosebudvillage.com

**Ms. Sophie McCarthy**  
*Manager*  
Zups Grocery Store  
997 E. Main St.  
Ely, MN 55731  
(555)55-5555  
sophiem@zupsgrocery.com

**Mr. Tyler Willis, MHA**  
*Vice President*  
Ely Bloomenson Hospital  
229 Tulip St.  
Ely, MN 55731  
(555)555-5555  
willis\_ty@bloomenson.com

request and (2) it allows you to alert your references with specific information about who will be calling. Additionally, you always want to bring copies of your reference sheet with you to an interview.

## **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

Letters of recommendation are traditionally used in the academic application processes, but there are many employers and internship providers who ask for letters of recommendation as well. Again, be sure to read the application instructions to know whether you are being asked to provide a reference list or letters of recommendation.

### **Who to Ask**

If you are applying for admission to an academic program, for an academic position, or scholarship/grant award, you will want to be sure that the majority of your letter writers are academics themselves, ideally in the field of interest to you. They should be professors with whom you have built a strong relationship either through taking classes with them or acting as their research assistant. It is also beneficial to include a professional reference who can speak to your abilities in a professional environment. This could be a past supervisor or boss.

### **How to Ask**

It is important to always politely ask for a letter of recommendation well ahead of the application deadline. It is extremely unprofessional to request a letter at the last minute. Be sure to give the letter writer at least two weeks to complete the letter for you. It is also imperative that you provide each of your letter writers with adequate information for them to provide you with the strongest letter possible. If you are applying for a graduate or professional program, put together folders for each of your letter writers with information about each of the programs you will be submitting their letters to along with a copy of your résumé and the related deadlines you need the letter(s) completed by. If you will be using the letter for a job or internship, you need to provide your letter writer with your résumé, the job description, and some information regarding your interest in the position and organization.

### **Following Up**

Be sure to send each of your letter writers a thank you note at the end of the submission process. You will also want to inform them when you have news to share about the position or admissions process. Recommenders always love to hear that you got into the program you were applying to or that you got the job you were shooting for. By keeping up with them you are also strengthening your professional network for the future.