HFC Career Services Office

Professional

References

Resource PacketA clipboard with a pen and a note

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HFC Career Services Office

A-115

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***How to Request a Letter of Recommendation***

* Our most important tip – **Do not wait until the last minute to request a letter of recommendation/evaluation!**  It is best to request your letter at least one month before you need it.  *Strong letters take a great deal of time to write.*
* Keep in mind that professors, instructors, physicians, supervisors, and advisors often write dozens of letters per year.  Make their job easier by following these guidelines:
  + If at all possible, **request your letter in person**.  Arrange an appointment with the potential letter writer, explaining that you want to discuss your plans to apply to professional school/graduate school/an internship/a scholarship/a special program/etc.
  + Don’t ask, “Can you write me a letter?”  Instead ask, **“Do you feel that you would be able to write a strong letter supporting my application to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?”**
  + **Be prepared to discuss** why you want to apply to your specific program/opportunity/schools, your aspirations, and why you think this person is a good candidate to write your letter.
  + **If the instructor, advisor, or professor says no, just thank them and move on.**  Try not to feel bad about it.  Their refusal to write you a letter will probably be better for you in the long run (if they don’t have sufficient time, information, or inclination to write your letter, they will not be able to write you a strong letter anyway).
  + **Discuss a due date for the letter.**  Keep in mind that it is common courtesy to give at least a month’s notice to your letter writer.  Remember that they write lots of letters, which takes time and effort.  After agreeing upon a date, don’t harass them.  You can visit their office or e-mail a “gentle reminder” a short time before the due date.
* At the meeting, **provide the letter writer with the following** (consider organizing it into a packet, folder, or manila envelope):
  + Resume or curriculum vitae (CV)
  + An advising report or copy of your transcript
  + Information about the opportunity for which you are applying
  + A personal statement – or a description of what you are planning to discuss in your personal statement
  + A list of areas you would like the letter writer to address in the letter
  + If you want something mailed, provide the stamps and addressed envelopes.

***Creating a Reference List***

A reference list shares a list of contacts able to speak to various aspects of your academic and  
professional experience. Reference lists are an essential part of your application, separate  
from your resume and cover letter. It is important to maintain strong communication with everyone so they are able to provide you with the best possible references.

**Step 1**

Build professional relationships with your professors in advance and keep them updated on your projects.

**Step 2**

Identify up to five people who could provide a good reference. Make sure to have their professional contact information, title, and their relationship with you.

* This should be a diverse list of people who know you from different projects, jobs, and industries (if possible). All should be able to speak to your character and quality work, and are trustworthy and know you well. Think of people you’re currently working with and people from previous roles.
* Whom to ask:

Professional references:

* + - Direct managers, supervisors, and bosses
    - Other managers and leaders at your company
    - Coworkers on your team and in other departments
    - Direct reports, clients
    - Managers and leaders at organizations you’ve volunteered for
    - College professors
    - Business partners
    - Academic advisors

Personal references:

* + - Mentors
    - People you know from networking or professional membership groups
    - Leaders of social clubs, hobby groups, or community service activities
    - Coaches or instructors from extracurricular activities
    - Faith leaders (such as a pastor or priest) who can speak to your job-related skills
    - Friends who have worked with you on a project or assignment

**Step 3**

If you’re applying for positions in which you have to provide references as part of the application process: **ask the reference before you apply!**Before sharing their information with a potential employer, you should always ask someone to be your reference.

*Tip:* Always frame your request in a way that allows the reference to refuse gracefully—for example, “Would you be comfortable serving as a reference in my upcoming job hunt?” or “Do you have time in the next few weeks to serve as my reference?”

Information to provide the reference after they accept:

* Quick overview of the company
* The job description
* Key job responsibilities highlighting key qualities/characteristics
* An itemized list of your skills that are relevant to the role with examples of your experience and how it qualifies you based on job functions and your qualities or characteristics
* Your resume for additional context

**Step 4**

After the reference call: Send a thank you email and a token of appreciation (gift card to a local coffee shop or thank you card).

A Reference Check or Letter of Recommendation is often a phone call or letter in which the employer will ask about your:

* Professional strengths;
* Contributions that are memorable;
* Reliability in terms of work habits and attendance;
* Ability to get along with people without sacrificing the ability to make tough decisions and get things done;
* Domain knowledge that allows you to be successful without having to be trained a lot.

**Tips for asking for a Letter of Recommendation:**

* Ask professors for reference letters now to keep for a few years.
* Ask professors who know you best now and have your work at the top of their mind.
* If your employer is seeking a letter of recommendation, come to the Career Services Office

Dos

* Create a reference sheet to have ready for when a potential employer asks and include the following information: Name, Current Job/Position, Company, Phone Number, Email Address, and a Reference Description: Write one sentence explaining how you know or have worked with this person, where, when, and for how long.

Don’ts

* Add reference names and contact information on your resume or cover letter.
* Add “references upon request” on your resume or cover letter.

Harry Hawkster

Detroit MI, 48321

111-222-3333

Hhawkster1@hawkmail.hfcc.edu

***Reference List (Sample)***

Dr. Ken Jennings   
Professor of Jeopardy  
University of Michigan-Dearborn  
120 Fake St

Dearborn MI, 48888  
[kj@notreal.edu](mailto:kj@notreal.edu)

111-222-3333

Worked with Dr Jennings on three separate research projects focusing on general knowledge and travel

Robert Zombay

Faculty Advisor  
HFC Math Club  
321 Imagination St  
Brighton, MI 49999

[rz@notreal.edu](mailto:rz@notreal.edu)

555-444-9999

Worked with Mr. Zombay on marketing, club development, and organization and completion of club trips

Ada Neve   
Supervisor  
Eden Landscaping  
216 Old Liar Drive  
Detroit MI, 41111  
[ae@notreal.com](mailto:ae@notreal.com)

222-333-4444

Worked for Ms. Neve for three straight years as a crew supervisor for her landscape company

Jeff Daniels  
Manager – Former Supervisor  
Rose Theater  
1901 Dream Circle  
Escanaba MI, 45555

[eidm@notreal.com](mailto:eidm@notreal.com)  
777-888-2222

Worked for Mr. Daniels on marketing and logistics processes for Rose Theater