

REFERENCES & REFERENCE LETTERS



REFERENCES

When looking for employment your prospective employer will expect you to provide references, that is, people who can vouch for your character or your work experience.

Employers are interested in having these two questions answered:

- a) Do you have the necessary skills to do the job? *and*
- b) What kind of worker are you? Will you fit in into my company's work culture, are you reliable, flexible, nice to work with, etc.?

A reference can be a previous employer, colleague or friend. Often, Canadian employers prefer references they can call over the phone, rather than a written statement. The main reason for this is that over the phone, they can also ask more specific questions regarding what kind of worker you are, if you are hard working, friendly, efficient, flexible, punctual, a good problem solver, committed to your job, a team player, etc.

We have also noticed that employers often prefer to get references from Canadian employers rather than from employers overseas. In addition to language reasons, the assumption is that there are shared values and similar understanding of what a good or bad employee is. Nevertheless, when hiring foreign trained workers, many employers will agree to make an overseas call, if they can talk to someone who speaks English.

REFERENCE LETTERS

Reference letters from previous and current employers are a good way to provide written proof of your character and work experience in the following situations:

- When accessing your previous employer directly is not possible.
- When submitting copies of past accomplishments in addition to other references.

What makes a good reference letter?

A reference letter should mention when you were employed with the company and in what capacity (duties), that you were an efficient and reliable employee, some positive comments on you personal/interpersonal skills, and that they believe that you will be an asset to anyone who hires you in the future.

Here is a checklist you may find helpful:

- Use of action verbs to describe your accomplishments, skills and strengths.
- Use of the active voice which indicates that you completed tasks and demonstrated desirable behaviours. The passive voice can indicate that events happened to you and tasks would have been completed whether you were there or not.
- How you performed the responsibilities required for the position or role. A glowing reference letter will include how you exceeded expectations in your position/role, even if it is only in one area.
- Descriptions of your contributions to the work/academic environment, whether in regards to your work habits, such as completed tasks on time, or your personal strengths, for example you are collegial and supportive.
- If possible, a statement indicating that the referee would re-hire you or collaborate with you on another project. People may also work several times for the same organization and it is beneficial for you if the letter indicates that you worked for or with the referee several times or that they expect to work with you in the future.
- The referee's contact information including his or her full name, appropriate title, address, phone number and/or e-mail address.

If you would like to explore this topic further, here are some additional resources:

Excellent Article: *The Keys to Choosing and Using the Best Job References in Your Job Search*
http://www.quintcareers.com/job_references.html

References examples: <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/referenceletters/a/sampleemployer.htm>
<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/recommendation-letter-sample.html>

Other sources used: <http://www.ualberta.ca/~caps/ReferenceLetters.pdf> and <http://www.workingincanada.gc.ca>

Back to the Job Search Skills Section: <http://www.jcfswinnipeg.org/JobInterviewingTipsInformation.html>