

PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES

Checking references is a critical element of the hiring process, and usually takes place toward the end of the process when the employer has established a solid interest in the job applicant. Your references can be allies in your job search, so be sure to select them carefully and prepare them sufficiently to offer the support you'll need in demonstrating your abilities to potential employers.

It is critical, therefore, to ensure that references are selected with care and discretion. Consider these tips:

- Select references who will be able to speak positively and knowledgeably about your skills, abilities and experiences.
- Prepare your references, especially your former manager. Request permission to use them as references, double-check their contact information (name, title, company, mailing address, phone number, email address), and remind them of your specific skill set.
- Anticipate credit/background checks. Some employers run credit and/or background checks on job applicants (especially if they will be working with money). Check your own credit rating so you can correct any errors or discuss any potential problems in advance.
- Don't offer references until they are asked for. Bring your list of references with you to the interview, but do not deliver them until the employer requests them.
- Notify your references immediately. Once you have given a potential employer your references, contact them to let them know the nature of the position for which you are being considered, as well as how you have positioned yourself for it. This will give them time to think about what to say.
- Follow up with your references. Thank them for their support and leave the door open for their future influence in your job search.

Here is what employers are looking for when they check references:

- Resume distortion—exaggerated accomplishments, untruthful information about training/degrees, changed job titles, inaccurate dates, misleading or fabricated listing of skills
- Legal protection—evidence of a violent history, criminal background or serious credit problems that could make the company the target of a lawsuit
- Performance history—past performance that can be seen as an indicator of positive future performance
- Psychological fit – whether you will fit into the culture of the new organization, including how you get along with others, your flexibility, your behavior under pressure and work values.
- Opportunity to read between the lines –experienced reference checkers with an excellent intuitive sense try to pick up on subtleties and innuendoes that provide critical information
- Chance to check the grapevine – industry contacts that can supply helpful informal information (that either helps or hinders the job seeker).