

## A Guide to Choosing a Winning Reference

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Regardless of how far down your career path you are, you would have regularly experienced a need to produce one or more referees for a job application. Depending on the role, you may be asked to put down a character reference, a professional reference, or a combination of both. So, how do you ensure that your referees can give you a competitive edge? Well, here are some tips.

Before you begin searching for suitable referees, you should be aware that there is a significant difference between a professional reference and a character reference. Your professional reference confirms your previous experiences, level of expertise and work ethic. This type of reference should come from your former managers, colleagues or any other professional connection.

**Even the smallest comment about your work habits can influence a Hiring Manager's decision, so make sure your referees can testify positively on your punctuality or reliability.**

#### Shortlisting Referees

On the other hand, it's possible to include industry associates or contacts from volunteering or personal projects outside of work as your character reference. Although not many employers would ask for a character reference, when they do, their aim is to discover more information about your personality, soft skills and cultural fit.

When you're looking for a professional or character reference, it's a good strategy to reflect on your performance and what your referees may say about you. Is there any particular feedback, or a comment that stands out in your mind? Even the smallest comment about your work habits can influence a Hiring Manager's decision, so make sure your referees can testify positively on your punctuality or reliability.

Furthermore, if you've previously had conflicts with other team members, it may limit what your referees can say about your teamwork skills.

You may also wish to take into consideration the length of your employment, the job title you held, the responsibilities of your role, and reasons for leaving that position as well as your performance on the job. If you are considering a career change, try to find a referee who can explain how your previous skills or experiences can give you an advantage in your new role. If your previous workplace did not suit you well, choose a referee who understands this and is able to represent you fairly.

## Referees Can Help You Boost Your Professional Reputation

When you're going through a list of your previous managers and team members, you'll begin to have a better understanding of how others see you as a professional. You can take this opportunity to reflect on your professional reputation, which is a first step toward creating a better reputation for yourself and can help you become more authentic in your communication with Hiring Managers. This is a great way to showcase your integrity and earn the confidence of your prospective employers.

### Asking for Permission

It is much better practice to get in touch with your referees first and ask for their permission before including their contact details in your CV. In fact, if you don't ask a referee for permission and they are subsequently approached by the employer, the employer could be at risk of **breaching the privacy act**. Gaining a reference's explicit permission in advance will avoid this risk and can have some benefits for you as a job seeker. Doing this will also give you the chance to ask them about your strengths and weaknesses. This approach will give you valuable insights about how to improve your professional reputation, as well as giving referees a chance to gather their thoughts before they provide a formal reference. If it's been a little while since you had last been in touch with your referees, you should consider forwarding them your latest CV and a copy of the job description. After that, update your referees about your progress, and thank them for providing a good reference.

## Checklist for Choosing Winning Reference



- Create a shortlist of people you worked with who can provide you with a great reference.
- Ask your reference for permission; out of common courtesy and also to avoid employer risk.
- When speaking to your reference, take the opportunity to ask about your strengths and weaknesses.
- Clean up your social media – a great online presence can sometimes replace a character reference.

## Managing Weak References

If you're worried about weak references, it's much better to be upfront about the issue than to let it come as a surprise. Tell your Recruiter or the Hiring Manager that one of your referees may comment on a situation in the past, a lack of expertise, or any other concerns about your performance on the job. Explain why you anticipate this, and describe how you have improved your professional standards since. For example, if there was a particular manager that you didn't work well with, describe the steps you have taken in order to improve your relationship with the manager and improve your performance. However, double check that your referees are fully aware of your endeavours, so that they can support your case.

**Even if your formal reference has been excellent, your professional standing could be undermined by a poor social media presence.**

## Social Media May Trump Character References

According to  research, 93% of Hiring Managers will now review a candidate's social profile as part of the recruitment process. 55% of respondents also report having reconsidered their hiring decision based on what they found on social media channels. Even if your formal reference has been excellent, your professional standing could be undermined by

a poor social media presence.

This means that you should be wary about what you put out on social media. Hiring Managers may use your social profile to find out the same information that they would get from your character references. **38% of Hiring Managers** report being influenced by what they found on social media channels, including the background information that supports professional qualifications, so make sure that your online presence is up to professional standards.

## Summary

While you're on the job, don't be afraid to seek feedback on your performance and your interaction with team members. There's no need to feel that you have to maintain a perfect professional reputation. In the long run, your career prospect can improve significantly from identifying and overcoming your weaknesses.

What your referees say about you has the power to make you win or lose the job you're applying for. So, choose your reference carefully and take time to reflect on your professional reputation. If you need more information about the topic, please don't hesitate to **get in touch**.