

10 Reference Letters

LETTERS OF REFERENCE

Many employers place importance on an applicant's letters of reference. Reference letters are oftentimes a vital pre-employment requirement for almost all candidates entering the job market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Letters of reference are letters written on your behalf by individuals who are in a position to have observed or know about your skills and abilities as they relate to the profession you are pursuing.

These letters of reference are statements of recommendation that should contain positive, relevant remarks about your experience, knowledge, and work-related qualities. The letters should provide comments on accomplishments and show direct evidence of qualifications.

REFERENCE WRITERS

Who writes letters of reference? In selecting appropriate people to write reference letters for you, consider the broad range of academic, community, civic, and occupational contacts you may have. You may want to choose from among your past and present professors, supervisors, and employers. Consider any individual with whom you've had a professional relationship.

Be sure to select individuals who are willing to submit only complimentary, glowing, and positive recommendations.

While personal references are generally not used, an individual may, none-the-less, comment on such personal qualities as your work habits, motivation, dependability, and initiative.

REFERENCE FILE

A reference file is a collection of selected reference letters. As a job seeker, you may find it useful to establish a reference file. This file should contain three to six letters of reference. While companies vary as to the number of references they require from candidates, you can feel confident that 3-6 letters will be sufficient for most situations.

Make several copies of your letters of reference and have a set available upon request.

Because some employers may prefer to receive your references directly from your university, you may wish to have a copy of your selected references on file with your university. Official reference files can be established through your university's Career Planning & Placement Center. Upon request, a reference file can be sent to any prospective employer.

FORMAT

Reference letters are generally written on official company letterhead in a typed standard business letter format. "Dear Prospective Employer" is an appropriate salutation for a reference letter. The remarks in the letter should be directed in a fairly general manner so that the letter will be suitable for a wide range of prospective jobs.

Provide a copy of your resume to each person you select as a reference and discuss with them the qualifications you are interested in communicating in your reference letter.

Some employers (especially public school systems) prefer standardized reference forms or check sheets rather than letters of reference.