

## How To Choose A Referee For Your CV

Author: Sifiso Dingani . July 2020

### Introduction

A CV, short for curriculum vitae, means “course of life”. It is a detailed document highlighting your professional and academic history. CVs include information such as work experience, achievements, and awards, scholarships, or grants you have earned, research projects, and publications of your work (Gary Dessler, 2015).

A conventional CV consists of several important parts, including the references section at the end of the CV. References are the people who can talk of your work experience, work habits, skills and character (Jay Barney, 2012) It has been a widespread practice to include at least one or two referees who know you well, have worked with you in one way or another and who can vouch for you to the prospective employer.

Some questions that employers might ask your referees include ([Glassdoor](#)):

- In what capacity do you know this person?
- What can you tell me about their skills, abilities, work ethics, punctuality, personal character, and conduct with other people?
- Is this person employable?
- Will they be a good fit for this job role and our organisation?
- Should we consider hiring them?

You have to be very careful with who you put down as your references.

### Who should be my referee?

A referee should be a contact from a previous employer, ideally your line manager or someone you worked closely with. If you are new to the job market then your lecturers can be used as your references. If you do not want your current employer to know you are looking for a new role, chose someone from your most recent job before that or a trustworthy workmate.

Referees could include contacts from Saturday jobs, temporary work, or volunteer positions. You could also supply details of a teacher, lecturer, or tutor but work references are always preferred(Jay Barney, 2012).

Sometimes, references are only given out by the HR department of an organisation. In this case, only basic information is likely to be provided.

## How do you ask someone to be a referee?

Referees are crucial in the job-seeking process. Most people focus on presenting their qualifications, skills, and experience and spend little time deciding on who should be their referees. However, choosing a good referee can make all the difference. If you choose the wrong person, you might be rejected from jobs that were perfect for you. Below is a guideline on "How to ask someone to be a referee."

You can ask someone to be a reference through a phone call or via email if you cannot meet them in person. Firstly, you need to make a list of people you would like to be your references. Choose people who respect your work and will likely give you a positive review. Contact them in order of preference until you have enough references to. Most employers ask for two or three references.

Here are some steps you can follow when asking someone to be a reference.

### **1. Give them enough time to respond before you apply**

Make sure to ask someone to be a reference before you apply for a job. Give them time to consider your request, review your resume, and the job description and prepare responses to questions the hiring manager may ask. Keep your request brief and be polite.

### **2. Recap how you know each other**

Update your reference on what you are currently doing since the last time you spoke. If it has been a while since you talked, reintroduce yourself, explain how they know you.

### **3. Form your question in a way that lets them say no if they need to**

Ask someone to be your reference politely and without putting pressure on them to say yes. For instance, you could say, "would you feel comfortable providing me with a professional reference?"

### **4. Describe the job you are applying for**

Send your reference and the description of the job you want and the skills and experience it requires. If they understand the industry and the position, they can talk with the hiring manager about the traits you have that are most relevant. The more information you give a potential reference about the job you are applying for, the better prepared they will be to give you an effective recommendation.

### **5. Send your CV to each reference**

Your resume helps remind your references of projects you have worked on together and tells them what you have been doing between then and now.

### **7. Confirm their contact information**

Ensure that you have the current and preferred mailing address, email address, and phone numbers for your references. Ask them how they would like the hiring manager to contact them. Additionally, confirm their current job title.

Below is an example of how to ask someone to be your reference via email, courtesy of [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com):

**Subject line:** \*Insert your name\*: Reference Request

Dear \*Insert Recipient Name\*

I am currently applying for a job as a Finance Consultant at Company X and would be honoured if I could list you as a reference. After working together for two years at Company Y, I believe you can testify to my skills and experience in the finance industry.

I have attached my CV and the job description for your review. Please let me know if you need more information. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

\*Insert your name and phone number\*

If you ask someone to be a reference over the phone or in person, the conversation will be more flexible. Give your reference the same information you would list in an email request, but let the conversation guide you.

When asking someone to be a reference, follow these tips to make sure you remain professional

- Ask in order of reference
- Listen for hesitation
- Say thank you
- Give Updates

## Can a professional reference be a family member?

Do not choose:

- a friend of the family or a neighbour (unless they have specific knowledge of your work)

The best references are written by people who know you well, so pick the person you worked most closely with at your last job or the lecturer who you got on best with. It helps if you had a friendly working relationship with them too! Choose someone who will write a sympathetic reference and be as positive about you as possible.

Some employers may have a policy of only providing factual references – stating only your dates of

employment, job title, and possibly the reason for leaving. While these should not be viewed negatively by a potential employer they will not help you convince them of your suitability. It can be very worthwhile asking your employer to provide you with a full character reference, even if this is provided on a personal basis rather than as an official employer reference.

## How many do I need?

Most people have **two** referees. However, a few jobs ask for three referees so make sure that you have a reserve that you can call on.

## Do not ignore the power of testimonials

Testimonials can be included with an application, especially as an addendum to a CV, but are often also given on your profile page on LinkedIn. These are similar to references but are provided by you as an applicant rather than sourced by the employer. While an employer is likely to still take up references, testimonials can be a very powerful addition to your application and have the advantage of being known to you in advance. When you choose your referees, ask for a testimonial in the same way you would ask them to act as a referee.

## What do I need to do before nominating my referees?

Please make sure you:

- have obtained their approval to choose them as a referee and that they are willing to complete structured report for you discuss your application with them and you have their support
- Make them aware of the structured report process - the type of information and level of detail expected from them within their report is confirmed in our guidance for referees.
- give them a copy of your CV
- Make them aware of how we will contact them for their report.

In the job hunt, there is so much focus on the CV and the interview that your professional references do not get enough attention. But there are several mistakes that many job applicants make with their references that could easily be avoided. Below are some points stated by Lindsay Olson, founder and public relations recruiter with Paradigm jobs and hoojobs.com.

1. **You have got "References upon Request" on your resume.** Employers and recruiters know they can get references from you at the appropriate time. It is a given. You are wasting valuable real estate on your resume when you do this, and you'd be better off filling that space with more job experience, skills, or education information.

2. **You send your list of references without being asked.** It is not necessary to send your references to every potential employer. For one reason, you could inundate your references with calls, and they will not even be prepared by knowing what position you've applied for. Instead, focus on only giving

references to employers who are serious about hiring you, and give your references a heads up to prepare for the call.

3. **Your references are not prepared.** It is important to have your references know a little about the position you have applied for so they can discuss your most relevant skills and provide you with the strongest possible reference. Applying for a variety of positions without letting your references know is equivalent to throwing both them and yourself under the bus.

4. **Your references cannot speak to your job experience.** When you are young, you may not have that many people who can recommend your professional experience, but resist filling the list with your friends and family. Instead, look to past college professors, internship or volunteer coordinators, or mentors to talk you up. If you have relevant job experience, your most recent employers and colleagues will be your strongest reference. Typically, the more recent the reference, the better. References tend to forget many of the specifics of working with you over time.

5. **You have not asked for your references for permission.** If you list former bosses on your reference list and they are unaware of it, you risk them being taken by surprise, and even possibly giving a shaky recommendation. Always ask for permission to use someone as a reference, and give them as much information about the jobs you're applying for as possible.

6. **You list bad references.** Make sure you get a good recommendation from anyone you put on your reference list. Some employers will not formally give any more information other than dates of employment and information on your eligibility for rehire. If the answer is no, you have lost your chance at the new job.

7. **Your contacts are outdated.** Before providing your references, you should make sure all the contact information is updated, so that you don't waste the time of potential employers. You do not want to hold up the reference-checking process because you can no longer locate one of your references. Checking in periodically is a good way to stay in touch and reconnect as well.

8. **Your references are old.** If you use a boss from 10 years ago as a reference, potential employers might scratch their heads and wonder why you don't have anyone more recent who can vouch for you. If you do use an old boss or mentor, make sure it is someone you still stay in touch with and you have more recent references to send along.

9. **Your reference list is long (or short).** No employer is going to call a lengthy list of contacts, so unless you're asked differently, aim for three to five people—and ask what types of references the employer wants. Some employers only want to talk to previous bosses where others may want to hear from a client as well as a boss and a junior colleague.

10. **You did not bring your references to your interview.** Always be prepared and bring extra copies of your resume as well as your reference list to the interview. Better to have it and not need it than to be caught empty-handed.

## Can I provide my references on request?

### When to include references on a resume

Every word on your resume should be packed with value. Typically, you have one to two pages to explain why you're qualified and well-positioned for the job, and hiring managers only have a short time to read it.

Because references are not always a part of the interview process, you are taking up limited resume space to provide what may end up being irrelevant to employers in this phase. Even including the phrase "references upon request" on your resume can be unimportant. If their interview process includes references, employers will ask you to provide them.

There are a few rare scenarios in which including references on your resume may be acceptable. If you are in an industry that accepts case studies or testimonials (like consulting, for example) on the resume, it may be appropriate to include the person and contact information for which these apply.

Additionally, it is acceptable to include references if the job description not only requires you to include references but explicitly states that they should be included directly on your resume. If not, you should include your reference list on a separate document.

In the interview stage of your job search, potential employers may contact your provided references. Hiring managers contact your references as part of their process to ensure you are a suitable candidate for the open role. Below is a summary of what you need to remember in terms of reference checks.

### How to prepare for reference checks

Taking an active part in the reference check process can make it go more smoothly for both you and potential employers. Follow these steps to prepare:

#### *1. Confirm your reference list*

Contact your potential references once you begin your job search to confirm they are willing to speak with potential employers. Express your appreciation if a reference appears hesitant or refuses, and try your next option. It is best to have references that will readily provide positive feedback. If a potential reference accepts, offer your gratitude and confirm you have the correct contact information such as phone number and email address.

Make sure to update your references on your career progress if you haven't talked to them recently. You can also give them a current version of your resume so they can review your professional history, skills, and achievements. Try to use people you have worked with in the past five years so potential employers will get a more recent perception of your work.

## ***2. Contact your references in advance***

Human resources will typically notify you when they plan to contact your references. Let them know as soon as possible so they have time to prepare. If you are interviewing for multiple positions at the same time, provide a job description for each role so they have context for their conversations.

## ***3. Have your character reference letter ready***

Depending on the job, HR may ask for a character reference letter. This provides potential employers insight into your positive qualities and personal attributes. You should have a general character reference letter available for the hiring manager at any time during the interview process.

When choosing someone to write this letter, consider a person who can attest to your positive traits and knows you well. Examples of people who may make a good character reference include:

- A personal or professional mentor
- Co-worker
- Professor or academic advisor
- Client, customer, vendor or business acquaintance

## **What to expect from reference checks**

Hiring managers will ask a variety of questions to gather a complete understanding of your work history and how it relates to the potential role. They may inquire about:

## **Your interview answers and resume**

One basic but critical purpose of reference checks is to confirm that your provided information is accurate.

The standard questions you should expect potential employers to ask your references include:

- *“Can you confirm the start and end dates of the candidate’s employment at your company?”*
- *“What was the candidate’s job title? Can you briefly explain some of their responsibilities in the role?”*
- *“How do you know the candidate?”*

These questions establish your relationship and can set the tone for the remainder of the reference check.

## **Your job performance and skills**

In addition to confirming details that you provided during the hiring process, reference checks also allow hiring managers to learn more about your performance at previous jobs.

They may ask questions like:

- “*Did the candidate have the necessary skills to be successful at their job?*”
- “*Did the candidate show any initiative to learn more or take more responsibilities?*”
- “*Were there any issues that may have affected their job performance?*”

The answers to these questions can help hiring managers assess if you are willing to learn new skills and are interested in career growth.

## Your strengths and weaknesses

Hiring managers typically ask questions like, “*What are the candidate’s greatest weaknesses?*” *\_and*, “*In what areas might they require additional support when first starting in a new role?*”\_ Questions about your weaknesses can assist hiring managers in learning more about your problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills. Your references can identify the challenges you experienced and how you overcame them.

Potential employers may also inquire about your greatest strengths with questions such as, “*In what areas does the candidate excel?*” *\_or*, “*What are the candidate’s best qualities?*”\_ The answers to these questions can highlight your skills and how they could transfer to the position. If your references review the job description, they can respond with strengths that relate to the role. They can also answer with their perspective of your best assets.

## Your work style

Asking questions such as, “*Did the candidate work best with a team or alone?*” or, “*Does she prefer specific instructions for a task or to work out a solution on her own?*” provide hiring managers insight into your work style. This information can streamline the on-boarding process and build a better relationship between you and your future manager.

HR might also ask, “*In what type of work environment is the candidate most likely to thrive?*” The answer can provide information about whether you are a good fit for the company culture and pace.

Reference checks can play a vital role in the interview process. Potential employers use them not only to verify your employment history but also to gain information on how you function as a co-worker and employee. Positive references can distinguish you from other candidates and make hiring managers more likely to remember you.

***Sifiso Dingani is a Talent Management Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm. Phone +263 4 481946-48/ 481950/ 2900276/ 2900966 or cell number +26377 551 7211 or email [sifiso@ipiconsultants.com](mailto:sifiso@ipiconsultants.com) or visit our website***

*at* [www.ipcconsultants.com](http://www.ipcconsultants.com)

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/How-To-Choose-A-Referee-For-Your-Cv>