Professional References Best Practices

Professional references are people who employers can contact to verify your skills, experiences, qualities, and attributes for a given role. Lists of references are typically brought to an interview or submitted with the application when required. Keep these items in mind when developing your list of references.

**DO**

Select References Appropriately

- Select references who know your work and have seen your work ethic in action.
- Seek their permission to be listed as a reference, and confirm they are both willing and able to provide you with a positive recommendation.
- Ask them for their preferred contact information, and include their name, organization, title, phone number and e-mail address at a minimum.
- Send them the job description you are applying for, or general information about the types of opportunities you are seeking.
- Provide them with your resume and cover letter, so they can reinforce the message you are sending to employers about yourself.
- Keep your references apprised of your progress periodically throughout your job search, and thank them for their contributions to your success.

Format the Document

- List 3-5 references who can comment on or attest to your professional competencies and academic background related to the job; typically your advisor, supervisor, lab manager, committee member(s), teaching coordinator, mentor, etc.
- Format your name and contact information the same way as on your resume to give your documents a consistent appearance.
- Identify your professional relationship (how you know the person).
  - **OPTIONAL:** Consider also including a brief description of what they can say about you. This may help guide employers in efficiently following up with your references.
- Include the contact information for your references directly on your CV (but not on a resume).

**DON’T**

- Include family members, relatives, partners, friends, or other personal connections and “character” references.
- List your references directly on a resume.
- Write “References available upon request” on your resume.
- Wait until the last minute to seek permission from your references. You may be left scrambling to find a great recommender, or they may not have time to fully prepare.