

References (letters of recommendation) are statements that attest to a person's qualifications and/or personal suitability for a particular job or for entry into a graduate program. Employers and programs will vary in their requirements regarding number and type of references, but you can follow these basic guidelines in most situations.

- 1) Identify potential reference persons early in your college career. Get to know your professors, for example, and let them get to know you. Impress them!
- 2) If you are not certain that a person, e.g., a former employer, will write a positive letter of reference for you, ask them directly if they feel they can. You may feel a bit awkward in doing so, but it is better to ask than to receive a negative reference letter.
- 3) Your potential list of reference persons should include a balance of academic, employer, and personal references. The first two are clearly the most important. You may wish to prepare a list of references on the same kind of paper as your resume. The list can be provided when an employer requests references or it can be attached to the resume.
- 4) Three or four is the minimum number of references to obtain. If you are applying for several different positions, you may need additional reference people to attest to your different qualifications/interests.
- 5) When you request a reference, remember that it is a request and may be refused for lack of time or if the person does not feel that they know you well enough to adequately comment on your potential. Ask what is manageable for the reference person, whether it be a single letter, telephone call, or letter tailored to a particular position.
- 6) Provide the reference person with a resume and, whenever possible, a description of the job or graduate program for which you are applying.
- 7) Give the reference person time to write a letter - at least two weeks. A strong letter of reference is grounded in facts and specific examples take time to prepare.
- 8) As a courtesy, supply the reference person with a stamped, addressed envelope.
- 9) Cornell Career Services works with Interfolio to manage the credentials of students and alumni. Interfolio is a service which allows you to create an online portfolio of letters of recommendation, transcripts, and other personal documents. The service eliminates the burden of asking reference persons to submit duplicate letters to every institution or employer to which applications are made. To establish a portfolio, visit the Interfolio website: [www.interfolio.com](http://www.interfolio.com). A fee is charged for establishing and maintaining the file; fees are also charged each time the file is sent to an employer.
- 10) A definite word of thanks or a written thank you note is the correct follow-up. A final courtesy to the reference person is a note stating that you have or have not received the job, acceptance to graduate school, etc.

## Ready Reference

CALS Career Development Office, Cornell University, 177 Roberts Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853  
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