Lasell College Career Services

References

What is a reference?
A reference is a written or spoken testimony about you, your skills, your abilities and your experiences. There are two types of reference. The first is a verbal or spoken reference. In this case, your reference agrees to speak directly to a potential employer by phone and answer specific questions about you. The second is a written reference or letter of recommendation. This is an open letter addressed to whom it may concern detailing the writers’ knowledge of you and your skills.

Why do references matter?
Think of a reference like you would a restaurant review. Imagine that you are trying to decide between two restaurants. All you know about Restaurant A is what they have written about themselves in their advertisement and what they have said to you on the phone. With Restaurant B, you have their advertisement and have spoken to them on the phone. In addition, your friend highly recommended it to you. Which restaurant would you decide to choose? Restaurant B of course. Your interest in the restaurant was confirmed by the favorable review. This is why employers use references. They want this third party endorsement to confirm what they have already read or been told by you.

How many should I have?
Usually three written and three verbal references is an acceptable number. However if there are more than three people you can ask, this is good because you may want to use different references for different employment opportunities. Whenever you leave a job or position, it is a good idea to ask your supervisor to write you a letter of recommendation immediately. You may not need it right away, but you will have it when you need it. Often by the time you contact an old supervisor, you learn that they are no longer working there. You have now lost your chance to utilize them as a reference.

Who should I use?
Typical references include employers, supervisors, professors, and coaches; someone who can attest to your skills and capabilities. ALWAYS ask permission ahead of time to use someone as a reference. If you have used someone in the past, and want to use them for a new job search, you will need to re-contact them and ask if it is still ok. Use this opportunity to update them on what you have been doing and tell them about your current job search.

What should be included in a letter of recommendation?
The letter should address how long the writer has known you, the quality of your work, dedication, skills and work habits. When you ask someone to write you a letter of recommendation, be prepared to tell them what type of positions that you are applying for, and suggest to them what types of things they may want to highlight or discuss. You should also give them an updated copy of your resume and remind them of your specific accomplishments and strengths.
What if my reference asks me to write the letter for them?
Many people are happy to be asked to serve as a reference, but when I comes time to write it, they don’t know what to say. You want the reference to be in their words. Therefore, instead of writing it for them, it is better to talk with them about why you want them to write it. Give them suggestions and ideas of what to include.

Can I use the same letter for more than one job?
Yes. Instead of asking your reference to write a letter addressed to a specific company, you ask them to write an open letter addressed to “to whom it may concern.” This way you can obtain the letter in advance, make copies, and distribute it as needed.

Can I use the same person for both a verbal and written reference?
Yes. You may also want to ask if they prefer to be called at home or work and the best time for a potential employer to reach them.

Do I put my references on my resume?
No, Your references DO NOT go on your resume, they are a separate document. Make sure you label this document as being your list of references by making a heading such as "References for Terry Jones." Then list the name of your reference, their occupation, phone number, email, length of time you have know them, and the nature of your relationship. Print this on paper that matches your resume.

How and when do I give my list of references and letters of recommendation to an employer?
Typically at the end of the interview, you can offer your references to the potential employer. Sometimes they will ask for them before an interview or request that you submit them with your resume and cover letter. It is best if you can give them your typed list of verbal references and your letters of recommendation. This way they can get some immediate feedback plus ask specific questions by phone to your verbal references.
References Sample Layout:

References for Terry Jones

Sarah Smith
Manager
Gram’s Kitchen
5 Bear Road
Newton, MA 02466
617-xxx-xxxx
* Direct supervisor for 1 year when I was a waitress at Gram’s Kitchen

Anne-Marie Kenney
Director of Student Activities
Lasell College
1844 Commonwealth Ave
Newton, MA 02466
617-243-2122
akenney@lasell.edu
* Advisor for Student Government Association where I have been a member for the past year

Helen Alcala
Associate Professor
Lasell College
1844 Commonwealth Ave
Newton, MA 02466
617-243-2260
halcala@lasell.edu
* Professor teaching both my First Year Seminar course and Spanish 200