

Professional References

What is a Professional Reference?

A professional reference is someone that can prove your qualifications and experience. They can be a professor, a former employer, a supervisor or manager.

They should not be a family member, friend, or clergy. The exception is, if you have specifically worked for them.

It's alive! As your employment changes, it is a good idea to remove past references and add new references.

Formatting: Use the same header for all your application materials.

Your name should be the first and largest font on your professional references page.

Keep your professional references to **one page!**

Organize them by relevance to the future job or chronologically.

Quick Tips:

- > Ask your references before adding them to the list.
- > Keep your references off your résumé. They take up valuable space.
- > Protect your references. Don't share their contact information
- > Proofread. There is no excuse for mistakes.
- > Select people that will speak highly of your skills.
- > Minimum of three and no more than 10 references.
- > Contact each reference to let them know you are actively seeking a new position.

Your Name

Street Address, Town, State, Zip Code
555.555.5555 • your.email@yotes.collegeofidaho.edu

Professional References

Professional Reference Name, Title
Company
Street Address
Town, State Zip Code
Phone Number
Email address

Professional Reference Name, Title
Company
Street Address
Town, State Zip Code
Phone Number
Email address

Professional Reference Name, Title
Company
Street Address
Town, State Zip Code
Phone Number
Email address

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Recommendations & Reference Etiquette

1. **Choosing your reference(s):** This requires a lot of thought, do not rush this decision. The individuals you ask should be those who know you well. These are the professors you talk to outside of class or the employer that has been a mentor to you. If you have only taken one class from a professor and done well, the professor can only speak to your academic performance. Thus, you want to make sure you are intentionally building authentic relationships throughout your undergraduate career.
2. **When to ask:** Have you decided who you want to ask to be your reference(s)? Great! Ask them *now*! If you are hoping for a well-done and thoughtful letter on your behalf, ask your references many weeks in advance. The absolute minimum amount of time you can ask someone to write you a letter of recommendation is two-weeks...but they may not be too jazzed about the short notice. Writing a strong letter can take a few precious hours; be courteous of your references' time.
3. **Wait...how do I ask?** You are about to ask someone a favor—to do something to your benefit, not theirs—and it feels awkward by nature. Remember, needing recommendations or references is a normal part of navigating adulthood. If you have given great thought to who you are asking, they will usually be happy to do so. You can ask someone via email or in person, but with either mode, do so thoughtfully. The number one thing that makes or breaks a request is the time you have given the individual; make sure the deadlines or a projected time frame is clear when you make your request.
4. **They Said YES!** Exciting, isn't it? Congratulations! Now you need to follow up your request with descriptive materials. This can include your resume, personal statement/cover letter, a job description, a brief overview of the graduate program you are applying for (including your goals). Once again, just so it is in writing, clearly state deadlines. Most schools and jobs have shifted to electronic recommendation notifications, where the agency or school will contact your reference individually; however, some places still require hard copies be mailed in. In this case, provide your reference(s) with proper materials. Print out any required forms the agency or school needs filled out by the recommender and provide them with an appropriate pre-addressed envelope and postage. This way when your letter is done, it can be sent directly to its destination. This brings us too...
5. **Do I waive my rights?** Yes, it is highly encouraged to waive your right to see any recommendation. By doing so, whomever is writing on your behalf can be honest, candid, and usually that means a stronger recommendation for you.
6. **It's out of my hands now:** Nope! You have two VERY important steps still.
 - a. Always, always, always follow up with a thank you card or letter. Your reference just advocated for you, *big time*. Show them the appreciation that they just showed you!
 - b. Whether the outcome is an offer or a denial, make sure and let your reference know the outcome of your combined efforts. Not only does this keep you in touch, but it also allows the opportunity for your reference to offer to be a reference in the future.