

Reference Checking Tips

(Help from monster.com)

The following list of reference checking guidelines or "tips" will help hiring managers select the best candidates for employment and significantly reduce the risk of negligent hiring claims.

- **Getting Started**

Permission must be given from applicant to contact references. Permission is indicated on the application. As a courtesy, you should remind the applicants during the interview that references will be checked. Conduct all reference checks prior to making a job offer.

Familiarize yourself with the job description, qualifications, and department needs. Hiring Managers are responsible for conducting reference checks.

Prepare by being thoroughly familiar with a candidate's file and any interview notes you have taken before you contact a reference.

Check references only for the finalist or, in the event of a too-close-to-call situation, finalist(s).

- **Making the call**

Identify yourself immediately, explain your position and why you are calling. Assure confidentiality. Explain position candidate is applying for.

- **Check at least three references.**

Obtaining multiple references allows prospective employers to look for consistency among comments and to demonstrate that reasonable care was used in the hiring process.

- **Ask for different types of references.**

The best references generally come from former supervisors. Peers and subordinates are also excellent references. The best scenario is to gather past job performance information from references who have different perspectives of the applicant.

- **Ask about past job performance.**

When checking references, be sure that all questions relate directly to job performance and nothing else. What job applicants do on their own time should not be an employer's concern, unless it could adversely affect their ability to do the job. One of the best questions to ask at the end of an interview is, "Would you hire this person again?"

- **Know the statute of limitations.**

A reference check should cover the most recent five to seven years of employment. There's not much point in talking to references from 10 years ago -- most references will be hard-pressed to remember

much about the specifics of an individual's past job performance a decade ago, and people do mature and change over time.

- **Avoid personal references.**

Personal references are generally a waste of time. Always insist that the candidate provide references who can and will comment on the candidate's past job performance. Employers have every right to ask each candidate for the type of references they want -- not the references the candidate wants the prospective employer to have!

- **Check references by telephone.**

Mailing a form is better than doing nothing, but not much. Thorough reference checking includes listening carefully to responses. A reference's tone of voice can change the meaning of a response dramatically. Talking to references also allows for follow-up questions prompted by the response. It's hard to ask follow-up questions from a piece of paper!

- **Ask open-ended questions about job performance.**

Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no. Questions like, "How would you describe John's management style?" will provide more information.

- **Use qualified people to do reference checking.**

People who check references must be trained to listen for the underlying meaning of comments and ensure that it is thorough, professional, and legal. Never be satisfied with a response such as, "She was the best employee we ever had." Follow up with a question like, "Could you give some examples of how her performance was so outstanding?"

- **Avoid these questions at all costs.**

Never ask questions about age, race, sex, religion, marital status, or national origin. These are all federally protected categories, and they don't have anything to do with past or future job performance!

- **What if references won't talk?**

Even though it is the prospective employer's responsibility to thoroughly check references, it's the candidate's job to provide the names. If references refuse to talk or cite a company policy against providing such information, put the burden on the candidate to come up with appropriate references who will talk or to convince reluctant references to do so. If the candidate can't do that, look for someone else to fill the job!

One Reference Form is required and must be electronically attached (if non-ASU) when completing the Hiring Proposal.

[Interview/Reference Questions to Not Ask](#)