

Student Resource Center Reference File

A reference file contains letters of recommendations (also called letters of reference) which you have requested from people who know you well. You will typically need three to five letters in your file. Our office maintains files for up to ten years for all students and alumni who have completed the proper forms, which are available at the Student Resource Center. As a service to you, the SRC can hold copies of reference letters and send them out to potential employers upon request. There is no charge to undergraduates for this service. Upon graduation, a one-time fee is required if you wish us to continue to maintain your file for the next ten years. Should you choose to take your references with you when you graduate, you are welcome to take the “open” letters, but we are unable to provide you with copies of the “closed” (confidential) ones (see below).

Reference Forms and Open/Closed References

The SRC has blank reference forms for you to use or your reference writers may write a letter on their own letterhead. You will also need to review and make a choice about the confidentiality of your references as follows:

- Open letter: Choosing this option means you are free to read letters written about you and allows you to take a copy of the letter. Most students choose to keep their letters open.
- Closed (confidential) letter: The reference is confidential and you may not see what has been written about you under any circumstances. If you choose this option, we will not be able to provide you with a copy of the letter.

Letters of Recommendation for Employment

Letters of recommendation written by professors, supervisors, coaches, or past employers can play an important part in improving your chances of getting a job. The people you choose to write letters on your behalf can make the difference in your selection as an employee.

- Think about which people to ask to write letters of reference for you. It is recommended that you choose to have references from people who know you well and who are most likely to write strong letters in favor of your candidacy, including both former/current employers as well as faculty. You should not select personal or character references unless specifically told to do so.
- Before handing out a reference form, make sure to ask the person if (s)he would be willing and able to write you a positive letter of recommendation.
- Plan ahead in asking for references. For faculty, the end of the semester is a very busy time and, in other cases, you may find that your faculty members may be away from campus (sabbatical, conferences, vacations, etc.).
- Provide your reference writers with – a copy of your resumé and a note explaining the types of positions for which you will be applying. Ideally for faculty, give them a list of courses you took with them, specific papers, projects or presentations you completed, the semesters you had those courses, and the grade you received.

- You may also want to ask permission to provide a prospective employer with contact information for your references (phone, email, address) in case an employer would prefer to contact your references directly. This information would then be provided as a list of references (see example on page 52) rather than as reference letters. This list is a document you would maintain and would not be included in your Reference File in the SRC.

Letters of Recommendation for Graduate School

A good graduate school reference provider knows you well enough to comment fully on your ability to perform graduate level work, firmly believes in your desire to continue your studies, and is familiar with your chosen field of study.

Make a list of potential reference writers – faculty, staff, supervisors, employers, coaches - and refine it as you narrow your search for graduate programs.

Let your reference writers know well in advance of deadlines that you will be applying to graduate school, arrange to meet with them about your program, and ask them if they would be willing to write a letter in support of your application. Be aware that your reference writers may not always be available whenever you need them (sabbatical, conferences, vacations, etc.).

Supply your reference writers with all the information they need to write a strong recommendation:

- Your deadline dates. This does not necessarily mean that the date you give your reference writer is the date the application is due. Give yourself some time to pull your application together and some extra time in case your reference writer just doesn't get to it as promised.
- A description of the program(s).
- The application materials – recommendation forms, envelopes, stamps for mailing if the recommendation is to be mailed separately from the rest of your application.
- Your resumé and a list of qualities you have that would support your application.
- If the reference writer is a faculty member, include a list of classes taken with that faculty member, grades received, major projects/papers/presentations, and a copy of your personal statement.
- How to contact you should they have any questions.

The majority of graduate programs will ask for confidential references. This means that you have waived your right to review the letter of recommendation. Make sure you are comfortable with the people you choose to write your letters and this will not be a problem. If you are hesitant about what someone will write about you, perhaps you should choose another person.

Give each graduate program what they are asking for. Don't send too few recommendations. Make sure the letters are on the forms provided by the school. Don't substitute other information in lieu of a letter of recommendation without checking with the admission committee.

List of References

Some employers prefer to speak to your references directly rather than reading a letter. If this is the case, you'll want to provide those employers with a list of the people who are willing to serve as your references and their contact information. Remember to ask your references if they are willing to be contacted, and where to reach them (office, cell, and/or home). An example of a list of references is given on the next page. This list is a document you would maintain and would not be included in your Reference File in the SRC.

REFERENCES FOR NEWTON B. GRAD

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