



References and recommendation letters

When you apply for a job, externship, internship, or other professional experience, you most often will need references, recommendation letters, or both.

References

Start identifying 2-3 people that would serve as a good reference for you. These references could be academic (e.g. a clinical instructor), a supervisor (e.g. a former or current boss), or nursing specific (e.g. a preceptor). Often it's good to have a blend of different people, so that the combination of references gives the employer a diverse sense of your skills.

Typically the employer will ask for a reference list, either in the application or during the interview process. This will be a separate list of names, contact information and brief description of the relationship.

How to ask someone to be a reference...

Let the potential reference know in advance of your application. Ask him or her if they would be willing to serve as a reference and if you are able to give out contact information (phone and email). You must ask in a way that allows the person to say no. Sometimes people might not feel comfortable serving as a reference and better to know this beforehand.

If the person says yes, set up a phone or in person meeting with the reference. Give a copy of your resume and talk about why you want the position(s) to which you are applying. This will give your reference a better sense of what strengths you have that connect to the position. In essence, this will help them sell you better. If the person says no, move on to the next potential reference, no hard feelings. You want to make sure the people that sell you feel comfortable doing so.

Recommendation Letters

Recommendation letters serve the same purpose as references, although sometimes the employer wants to read what the person wrote, instead of talking over phone or email.

How to ask someone to write a recommendation letter...

It's a similar process to asking for a reference, except this requires more time. You will need to ask your writer very early in the process, in order to give the writer enough time to write a good letter. You should meet with the writer, give your resume, explain why you want the position, and why you are a good fit for the position. Just as with a reference, this gives the recommender something to talk about. Since you are trying to market yourself for this new position, you want to make sure the messages being sent about you (via recommenders) is consistent with what you want to portray.

Thank You!

Of course, you will want to thank the person either before or after (or both) the recommendation is given. Just as you would after an interview, a thank you card is a great way to let the reference know how much you appreciate his or her efforts. And make sure to let him or her know when you get the offer!