



Career Resources

Employer References and Referees Guide

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suitability for the job
prepare in advance

master list of referees
reference letter
verify
past performance
referee contacts
employer policy
reference check

This material is designed as supplementary reading material for New Arrivals from Ireland.

New Arrivals have a broad range of qualifications, knowledge and experience in many functional disciplines. Certain guidelines may fit your profile, others may not. Ultimately, it is your choice to select the guidelines that best suit your situation and to design your job search and related documents including cover letter and/or resume that best represents you in the marketplace. Note that employment processes in Canada may be different than what you have experienced in the past.

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REFEREE(S) AND REFERENCE CHECKS

A 'referee' is **"a person that a recruiter or potential employer can email, call or contact to verify specific components of background."** *Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)*

- Referee is a term commonly used in Ireland. The term reference is frequently used in Canada alongside referee.
- For example, the Government of Canada, leading academic institutions, industry associations, career guidance boards (e.g. Monster and Indeed) as well as the CCDF make use of the word referee(s). At other times you may see or hear employers, recruiters and professional associations mention reference(s) or **reference check**.

Remember – Being asked for referee contact details/to provide a list of references for the purpose of a reference check is a standard and key part of the hiring process. **It is something you can and should prepare for in advance.**

If you are asked to provide referee contacts, the good news is you impressed the hiring team at interview! This part of the hiring process is typically reserved for the final candidate, in some cases the final two candidates.

- Employment or employer references typically come from someone who has supervised you, your boss, your manager, HR department etc. They are not provided by a friend or peer. Employment referees/references are different from 'personal referees' or a 'character reference', which you may be asked for in other settings.

What is the purpose of a reference check?

Providing solid references can improve your chances of getting a job. A reference check is designed to determine:

1. how you performed as a past employee
2. your suitability for the new job
3. your strengths and weaknesses (e.g. areas for development)
4. any other important information
5. if the referee would hire you again.

Employers in Canada routinely do reference checks on their final candidate, sometimes the final two candidates. Employers typically connect with referees either by email or phone, using the contact details supplied by you. The employer decides how to make contact according to their processes and practices.

Be ready to supply your contact details for reference check as soon as they are asked for.

How to prepare for a reference check

- It is better to have more credible people on your list than a shortage of referees. Get ahead of this by preparing a master list of referees in advance, regardless of the job vacancy.
- Be prepared to provide details for three referees from your master list.

- When creating your master list of referees start by:
 - (1) listing the supervisors from all your paid work including part-time/seasonal jobs.
 - (2) consider those who have supervised you for unpaid work (e.g. volunteer positions, placements).
 - (3) list those who are familiar with your academic/education performance (e.g. instructor/professor).
- When you have more than three people on your master list be smart about choosing who knows your work best. That is, a referee who is reliable, reachable, and willing to verify your work performance, your skills, and your work ethic in a supportive and credible way.
- Ways to keep your master list up to date:
 - (1) When you move jobs ask your supervisor if they can act as a referee for you then get the best contact details for them. In addition, it could be helpful to ask them for a 'reference letter' (see [reference letter](#) section for more on this).
 - (2) Add each new person to your list as you change jobs, acquire new experience, or education.
 - (3) As you gain more experience you may decide referees from your first job can be taken off your master list. It is also best to remove contacts that are no longer reachable.

Remember – Get permission! Ask your referees in advance if they will provide a reference for you. Let them know where you are relocating to and that you are actively applying for jobs. If you do not hear back from them move on to the next person. Don't provide their details without explicit permission.

- The turnaround time between final interview to being asked for referee details will be quick, sometimes it happens on the spot. Have three relevant contacts in mind **before** applying. Choose contacts relevant to the job applied for i.e. those who can best speak to your relevant skills for the new position.
- Get up to date information for referees and check in periodically to make sure their details are current i.e. email address, direct dial number including international dialing code, their current position title and company.
- Ask referees what time zone they are in, they relocate too!
- Prepare a **1-page referee contacts document** ([see template at end](#)) that you can easily and quickly send to the potential employer (attach it or paste into email) when asked by the hiring manager to share this information.

Useful Tip: Are you worried you don't have three employer referees?

Yes, it is best practice to provide three references from employers. BUT don't be put off if you have not got three employer contacts or a long history of employment. There are many reasons for this. A solution is to provide a combination of an employer referee, someone who supervised you for unpaid work or someone who graded/taught you from academia or as part of professional development. Still stuck on finding three contacts? Consider, is there a

person who coached/mentored you for a reasonable period in social interest group/sports team?

Examples other than employers may include: a teacher, tutor, volunteer coordinator, or Board Chair of a group you volunteer with, coach or chair of a team you play with.

- Include referee time zone and what their relationship is to you e.g. manager in Company A from 2020 to 2023.
- Remember, how you manage and present your referee information forms part of your professional brand, keep it consistent with what you have done so far.
- **Recognize, this could be the last step before you are offered the job!**
- Stay in touch with the prospective employer to confirm they have been able to reach your referee contacts using the details you provide.

Prepare your referee contacts ahead of time

When asked for reference details, inform your referees that you have given their details to 'Company ABC' and that you are expecting the hiring manager to contact them via email or phone. Doing this helps ensure that your referees are reachable and can best speak about your suitability for the specific job in question. Tips to help prepare your referees offer their best support include:

- Send them a copy of the job posting or spec; if it is a long spec summarize it for them; spell out the key skills required of the post holder.
- Share a copy of your application with your referee or at a minimum the career section and accomplishments listed for the role they supervised you in.
- Stay in contact and answer any questions your referee has.
- Remember referees are busy and may not always easily recall information you more readily have to hand, e.g. they supervised you from 2020-2023 or you started off in a part-time temporary position, then promoted to a full-time permanent role in 2021.
- With this in mind don't be surprised if you are asked to provide information as prompts.
- Share information about the new company you are applying for, the role title and key skills required or special highlights that make you a standout candidate.
- Provide the name of who is reaching out to them and their role e.g. the HR Manager, or the Contracts Manager who you will report directly to.
- Ask the referee to let you know if they hear from the prospective employer.
- Let your referee know how you can be contacted if they need to contact you.
- Thank your referee regardless of whether you get the job.
- Let your referees know how you get on in the hiring process.

Useful Tips:

- If you are being considered for a managerial position or one with supervision responsibilities, be prepared to provide both employer (supervisor) contacts **and** details for 1-2 people you have supervised (i.e. direct reports).
- Depending on the role and organization, a 360-degree reference check may be done, i.e. a multi-directional check that includes supervisors, peers/co-workers, direct reports.
- It is standard practice to ask a candidate to provide **three employer references**. Some organizations ask may ask for 2 – 4 contacts.

EMPLOYER POLICIES AND FACTUAL REFERENCES

Many companies have a policy in place that determines if/how they provide a reference on behalf of former employees/volunteers. Be sure to ask what the policy is.

A company may decide on a policy of providing former employees with a factual reference as standard practice. This is a way to protect the employer and former employee, limit the risk of privacy breaches or providing false or misleading information that could result in legal claims of defamation as an example.

A **factual reference** is one that provides a summary of employment. It covers strictly the facts that the person was employed at the company, their job title, the dates of employment. It includes facts that can be verified and nothing else.

REFERENCE LETTERS

When you leave a job ask your supervisor for a general reference letter. Do this in addition to asking them for permission to share their contact details as a named referee for specific vacancies. Getting a reference letter means you can leave the company with a letter in hand (or inbox) that speaks to your achievements and responsibilities in a general sense. **A reference letter isn't addressed to a particular person or written with a specific job in mind.**

Useful Tips:

- Your past employer may ask you to provide information to include in the letter or chat with them to ensure the content covers the general themes you know will be important for the type of roles you will apply for in the future.
- If your past employer doesn't ask to connect with you, then take the initiative and ask for 20 - 30 minutes of their time for this to happen.

Remember, the letter could set you up for success in a future hiring process! Invest in doing this on your own behalf, as part of your exit from the company.

Having a reference letter in advance can indicate to future employers/recruiters that you have a good relationship with your past employer. Recruiters/hiring managers may verify details from the letter without need to contact your past employer. Others will ask to contact past employers directly as part of their due diligence and company process. Some hiring managers will not accept a general reference letter preferring to tailor their approach to the position and company policy.

Former employers are commonly asked to provide a reference letter but it is important that you recognize past employers'/HR managers are not obliged to provide a reference letter. How you cultivate your workplace relationships generally and with your supervisor will be important as well as how you approach your transition out of the company.

REFeree CONTACTS TEMPLATE

Below is an example of what to include in your referee contacts document as part of the reference check process conducted by the hiring manager/recruiter. So long as the information is clear to follow, all information included is accurate, and it is easy for you to send to a prospective

employer then how you format it is up to you! The table is used as an example which you can use or discard.

[Your first name and your last name] – Referee Contacts

Name: [full name and title of your referee]
Position/Title and Company Name: [job title of your referee and company name]
Email: [ideally their work email attached to their position] If work email is not possible provide an email they can be reached on.
Contact Number: [direct dial, extension number and/or cell phone including international dialing code]
Working relationship: examples: [former employer and direct supervisor at <i>company ABC</i> from 2022-2025] or [Chair/Volunteer Coordinator of <i>ABCDEF</i> where I volunteered from 2024-2025] or [Professor/Tutor at <i>College 1234</i> for <i>Course AB-01</i> for Spring term, 2025]
Location/Time Zone: It is helpful to include a brief note to locate your referee if they are outside the employer's geographical location e.g. Ireland. This makes it easy for the hiring manager/recruiter. Be specific and spell out which time zone they are in (remember Spring/Fall changes may apply) and how many hours ahead/behind they are from hiring manager's time zone.

Create a second and a third table, then enter the above headings with details for your second and then third referee.

Good luck!

Remember, a reference check may be the final step asked of you in the hiring process before you are formally offered a position.