



About Reference Letters

Every letter of reference is unique. It is driven by certain factors:

- It applies to a certain individual.
- It comes from a specific person.
- It addresses the unique relationship between the referrer and the candidate.
- It applies to the unique set of contributions and behaviours of the candidate.
- It is based on a specific time or period, on one or more locations, and applies to a certain environment.

Always remain mindful of how the above factors help to create a strong and unique story for you.

What is in a Reference Letter

When these factors are expressed in a letter of reference, they will reflect some core pieces of information about you, the person about whom the letter was written.

- A statement about how the referrer came to know you, the duration (length) of your relationship with them, and the general nature of the relationship.
- An evaluation of you:
 - Which skills have been evident¹, and how frequently and influentially you have demonstrated them.
 - What you have accomplished and the significance of the accomplishment(s).
 - Proof of your successful action: examples of, or references to, your work. That will illustrate and support their statements about your qualities and/or performance.
 - A summary of your strengths and weaknesses².
 - Your formal or informal qualifications.
- A summary statement that expresses their overall sentiment toward you:
 - Why and how they believe you are qualified.
 - What makes you ideal or well-suited to the current opportunity.
 - Some assessment of your future potential in the role.

These items are not always expressed in this order, nor are all of them always included. The more factors that are addressed, the more clearly they are presented, and the more substantial the proof that is offered, the stronger your letter of recommendation will be.

What to Do

There are three important things that you can do to help yourself to secure the best reference letter:

- 1) Contact the person early to gain their consent, and to give them as much time as possible.
- 2) Help them to remember and agree on the important points about your time together.
- 3) Let them know exactly how the specific process works to make referring effortless for them.

¹ You may consider yourself to have capabilities but in no one sees them, there will be no proof of them.

² FYI: Many referrers will shy away from including weaknesses (challenges) in a reference letter.