

How to conduct a reference check

Reference checking

Since the most relevant referee information about job applicants will concern prior work experience, it is usual to contact two of the applicants' immediate managers/supervisors. Like the interview itself, it's worth having standard questions to ask the referee to make sure you're getting the most out of the conversation.

When should I check references and what should I expect?

Prior to making an offer to a candidate it's important to undertake reference checks in the first instance. You must get permission from the candidate to check their references. It is a good idea to ask the candidate to make their referees aware that you'll be phoning for a five to 10 minute reference check on a particular day.

How do I handle candidate friendly referees?

Referees will usually not hesitate in talking about the candidate's strengths but are often hesitant to talk about any potential weaknesses. One way to investigate this area is to ask questions such as "Are there any areas for improvement which you can suggest as this individual moves forward in their career?" This is not directly asking for areas of weakness but rather the areas which the candidate can further develop in the future.

What questions should I ask of referees?

Use the Reference Check list on the following pages as a guide.

Reference Check

Date:

Reference Check for: <Insert Candidate's name>

Position Applied for: <Insert Position Title>

Referee's Name: <Referee's name>

Title & Company: <Referee's position title and company>

Phone: <Contact number>

Candidate's role at this company: <role candidate held>

Dates candidate was employed: <date of employment>

Questions for Referee:

Effectiveness in role:

- "How effective was <name> in the performance of their role?"
- "Why do you say that?"
- "How was their performance measured?"

Strengths:

- "What do you think <name's> strengths are?"
- "Why do you say that?"

Technical Competence:

- "How would you describe <name>'s level of technical skills and knowledge?"
- Ask any questions that you have specific to the position

Deals with pressure:

- "How well do you think <name> deals with pressure?"
- "Can you give me some examples of times when <name> was under a lot of pressure?"

Supervisory skill and style:

- "Did <name> supervise anyone in their position?"
- If yes, "Can you tell me about <name>'s supervisory skills and style?"

■ **Areas of improvement needed:**

- “Based on your experience of <name> what areas did you note as needing further development?”

■ **Interaction with all levels of management and staff:**

- “How does <name> interact with different levels of management and other employees in the company?”

■ **Reason for leaving:**

- “Why did <name> leave your company?”

■ **Honesty and integrity:**

- “Are company values important to <name>?”

■ **Management Style**

- “What is the best way to manage <name>?”
ie. Micro-managed, given clear objectives, given some autonomy etc

■ **Rehire**

- “Would you rehire <name>?”

■ **Other:**

- “Are there any other comments you would like to add?”

Points to follow up in next reference:

Points to follow up with candidate: