

8 tips for navigating references

Great! Your work mate will vouch for you as a referee. Just stop there. Navigating references is a skill that can win you a job if you get it right.

Job hunting season is now open, if you want the best chance possible then remember that references are hugely important,” says Julie Sutton, recruitment manager at Ryan Recruitment.

There are rules to be followed if you want to nail this one:

1. **Use credible referees.** Referees should be someone you've reported to, says Oliver Hawkley, general manager of Parker Bridge recruitment. Ideally it's your existing employer. Otherwise use people in respected positions who can say good things about you. That may be your principal if you've just left school, your university lecturer, your work mentor, or an intern supervisor. Whatever you do, don't use your mates.
2. **Expect them to be checked.** Parker Bridge checks referees. If, for example there is just a mobile number, staff will check that this person is qualified to give a reference, says Hawkley. “We do need to educate some candidates that we will need the right person in the business to give them the reference. Some want to give peers, colleagues and people who worked on projects rather than someone they reported to.”
3. **Naming referees.** There is a mixed bag of opinions whether contact details for referees should be on [CVs](#). Sutton, says it's best not to name them so that candidates can forewarn referees before they are called. “It is for confidentiality,” she says. Sometimes managers don't know that you're job hunting. Hawkley adds “It is fine to say referees are available on request. Line managers are busy and can't be giving 20 minutes to five different employers.” You can be selective when you release those references.
4. **Go back three years.** Employers want references covering your last three years, says Hawkley. You can go back further in your CV, but only if it's really relevant to the job you're applying for.
5. **Sing your referee's praises.** You've got great references and you know it. Make a point of letting the recruiter or employer know. Not everyone will be so lucky as you and it will make you look good.
6. **Attach written references if you have them.** Recruiters still want verbal references in the 21st century. None-the-less good written references will add value to your application,

says Hawkley.

7. **Use quotes from your written references.** Sutton recommends adding quotes to your CV from your written references. It's easy to say yourself that you're "organised" and "pay attention to detail". That will carry a lot more weight if it's a quote from your former employer.
8. **Forewarn your referee.** Brief your referee with details of the job you're applying for and how you hope you'll be portrayed. There's nothing worse for a referee than being dropped in the deep end. They've been known to say the wrong thing, says Sutton. Don't let that happen to you.

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