
EDUCATIONAL CAREER SERVICES

WHAT THEY ARE

It is customary in the employment process for education-related positions for job candidates to provide employers with letters of recommendation from several individuals who can favorably recommend them for positions.

These letters of recommendations are generally written by individuals who have knowledge of candidates' academic preparation and career objectives, scholarly research and writing skills, teaching ability, and other competencies. These writers of references generally include university course instruction, departmental chairs and advisors, thesis and dissertation directors or committee members, cooperating teachers in public school districts, university supervisors of early field experiences, student teaching experiences and practicums, and employment supervisors. Individuals who write letters briefly describe candidates' performance and competence, specific accomplishments or talents, and their suitability for future employment.

HOW TO REQUEST THEM

Whom to Ask

Letters of recommendation can be requested from individuals whom you feel sure can provide positive, well-written letters that will support your application for employment. The best references are probably from those persons who know you well and who are able to speak and write favorably about you.

If you are completing an undergraduate degree in education and are applying for K-12 teaching positions, school district personnel directors will want to see letters of recommendation from: cooperating teachers and university supervisors of your early field and student teaching experiences; supervisors of education-related work experience (part-time or temporary employment in summer camps, with park districts, or day care

centers); and professors of your courses in education and your academic discipline.

If you are completing a graduate degree and are applying for positions in colleges and universities, agencies, or organizations, hiring administrators and/or search committees will want to see letters of recommendation from: thesis or dissertation directors or committee members; chairpersons or other faculty from your department; graduate deans or other administrators from your university of graduation; supervisors of teaching and/or research assistantships; and education-related employment supervisors.

If you are completing graduate work and are applying for positions in K-12 school administration, most school boards and hiring administrators want to see letters from: individuals who taught you or supervised your work in your educational administration program; one or more principals, department heads, superintendents who supervised you in your teaching and administrative positions; members of the school board in your district (for superintendent positions); individuals in the community who know your work (members of civic/community/ school-related organizations).

When to Ask

As you complete your major coursework in your degree programs, you should ask course instructors for letters of recommendation. Since many university faculty members leave the campus to change jobs, take sabbaticals, or retire, it is very important for you to obtain these letters while both you and they are still on campus.

Most cooperating teachers and university supervisors of the early field experiences (such as the Junior Practicum) will write their letters of recommendation near the end of the semester or just after the semester that students have completed their experiences.

Most thesis and/or dissertation directors will write their letters of recommendation near the completion of students' academic requirements for

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graduation and the completion of the thesis or dissertation.

In addition, as you change positions of employment, you should be sure that you have at least one letter of recommendation from your supervisor of employment.

How to Ask

There is a definite professional protocol or etiquette involved in asking people to serve as references. The two most important things to remember are: (1) always ask an individual's permission *before* you use him/her as a reference on a job application; (2) always thank people who agree to serve as references by writing them thank-you letters or calling them.

There are two types of recommendations that you may be seeking. Most references write general letters of recommendation which describe your suitability for certain types of employment, i.e., elementary teaching or public school administration. However, some individuals will write tailored letters of recommendation which support your application for a specific position.

Some graduate students and more experienced alumni who experience somewhat more competitive job searches than undergraduates and entry level professionals often feel that these more tailored letters are more effective in their job searches. However, remember that the tailored letter has a very short lifespan since it is used only for one position. You need to inform your references which type of letter they should be writing.

You should call, write, or visit people to ask that they write letters for you. If they appear to be somewhat hesitant or noncommittal, you may want to ask other people. If they agree to write letters,

you should inform them of the kinds of positions for which you will be applying, the kind of letter you need (tailored or general), the deadline for the job application, etc.

It is often helpful to provide your references with a copy of your most recent professional resume or vita to bring them up to date on what you've been doing. If some time has passed since you have seen the person writing the reference, you may want to remind them what course you took with them and during which semester, etc. You might also want to provide them with a job description of the positions for which you are applying. You can also suggest general qualities, interests, or abilities that you have that they might want to emphasize in the letter.

It is very important that you let your references know of deadlines.

HOW TO USE THEM

References on Your Resume or Vita

You should list your references' names, positions, addresses, phone numbers, and emails near the end of your resume or vita. In this way, potential employers can contact your references immediately without having to search and wait. Employers will phone the writers of your letters in order to verify the recommendations.

Checking on Your Letters

What do you do if letters you are expecting never arrive? You can send a reminder to the individuals whom you have requested letters from and hope that this is effective. If the letters still do not arrive after writers have been reminded, you may want to ask other people for letters.