

**SKILLS AREA RESOURCE SERIES**

# EMPLOYMENT REFERENCES

## **WHAT ARE REFERENCES?**

A standard request from employers is a list of references. These are your professional contacts who can attest to your credentials and work experience. References can include law school or undergraduate professors, former job supervisors, or other professionals with whom you have personal relationships or whom you know through participation in volunteer/other activities.

**GUIDELINES:** Generally, your reference list should include between three to five professional contacts. When compiling your list of references, consider the following:

- Request permission from each reference *before* submitting your reference list to employers.
- More recent references are preferable to earlier ones (i.e., law school professors are better references than undergraduate professors)
- References who know you/your work well are preferable to a senior/high-level person with less personal knowledge about you/your work. For example: A form letter of recommendation from your Senator whom you have met one time through your uncle often does not impress potential employers. Often, it is better to use an adjunct professor for whom you did great work and whom you got to know personally, versus the more well-known professor in your constitutional law class who does not know you personally.
- Do not be shy about approaching your professors, especially in classes where you excelled. They are used to helping students in this manner and are generally willing to help, even if you are not best pals.
- Contact your references after giving their names to a particular employer, even after requesting permission, to let them know they might be receiving a call, especially if a significant period of time has elapsed since your last contact.
- Be aware that some employers have a policy against giving references and will only verify dates of employment.

**FORMAT:** Ask potential employers whether they prefer a list of references or letters of recommendation. Usually, a list of references will suffice. However, some employers, especially judges seeking law clerks, require a letter/letters of recommendation. (See the Judicial Clerkship Handbook for guidance regarding clerkship recommendation letters.)

- Use a separate sheet of paper, with the same heading as your resume, for your list of references. Include the name, title, company, location (i.e., city and state), telephone number for each reference. Make sure all telephone numbers are accurate and up-to-date.

- If a past employer has given you a glowing written recommendation, it is appropriate to include that when sending references, even if not specifically requested.
- You may ask for a general letter of recommendation addressed “To Whom It May Concern” from a supervisor upon completion of an internship or employment to use for future job searches.
- References should not be included on your resume; nor is it necessary to write “References provided upon request” on your resume. Employers know if they request references, you will provide them.

**SAMPLE REFERENCE LIST:**

Joseph Michael Curry  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW · Washington, DC 20001 · (202) 555-5555 · jmc@law.gwu.edu

**REFERENCES**

Mary Smith  
Staff Attorney  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Energy Information Administration  
Washington, DC  
(202) 555-5555

Professor John Doe  
Constitutional Law  
The George Washington University Law School  
Washington, DC  
(202) 555-5555

John Johnson  
Vice President of Operations  
The Fir Company  
Boston, Massachusetts  
(617) 555-5555

(Supervisor, 1998-2000, as Vice President of Quality Control at Spruce Company in Washington, DC)