

How can REACH and Career Services Assist Students with Disabilities to Achieve Their Career Goals?

Part V: Prepare Application Materials (Cover Letters, Resumes, References, & Thank-you Notes)

References¹

Professional references are extremely important in the job acquisition process because they add credibility to your character and how well you can perform in the given job. Therefore, you should only ask people who are well acquainted with you and who can willingly speak positively about the activities in which you are/were engaged while associating with them. These people could include supervisors and professors. If you have been unable to obtain much employment experience, you could ask someone who has seen you make valuable contributions in different settings, such as volunteer environments. Regardless of your past circumstances, you can develop a strong reference network. For example, you might consider participating in On-Campus Internship experiences, which would allow you to become acquainted with the participating employers for whom you work on actual projects without having to leave campus. This will require work on your part because project managers (employers) are usually off-site. You will have frequent opportunities to meet virtually with employers and your fellow peers to discuss progress on your projects. Although taking behind-the-scenes roles might be tempting in such meeting settings, you need to actively participate so that employers will get to know your skills and abilities. In turn, you can confidently ask them if they would provide you with strong references around those skills and abilities.

In many instances, your references may have verbal conversations with prospective employers about your skills and character. There will also be many instances in which you will need to ask your references to write letters of recommendation. Regardless of the method by which your references deliver information about you, you should ask them if they are willing to serve as strong references within a short time after developing a strong relationship with them. When the need arises to use your references, make follow-up contact with them with as much notice as possible to inform them that they may be contacted (or that you need letters of recommendation) and send them your resume, any applicable job descriptions, and a summary of how you believe that you would be a good fit with the companies to which you are applying so that they can provide applicable information about yourself. If your references know that you have a disability, advising them to not disclose it to potential employers is advisable so that your chances of receiving a job offer are not unfairly diminished.

Sample References List

The following sample references list is fairly representative of what would be considered a quality example. Although this list contains only one reference, you should include three to six professionals in such a document. Please see the comments throughout the document for suggested changes or points about structure and content.

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NOTES

You need to use the same heading on all of your professional documents.

Bold the references' respective names.

Bold and italicize the references' various position titles.

This line needs to briefly state your relationship with the reference.

1. Brigham Young University Career Services (n.d.). Professional references [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://ucs.byu.edu/sites/default/files/Professional-References.pdf>
2. REACH (n.d.). REACH toolbox: Which resume is right for you? [PDF file]. Retrieved from https://uac.byu.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/Which%20Resume%20is%20Right%20for%20You_1.pdf
3. Brigham Young University Career Services (n.d.). Professional references [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://ucs.byu.edu/sites/default/files/Professional-References.pdf>