



# How to Ask for a Reference for Employment & Volunteering

## Who?

- References for work or volunteer applications can be supervisors from past experiences, professors that know you well, or even past clients if you've run your own small business (e.g. babysitting or cutting lawns).
- While someone who you reported to is preferred, if you are unable to use a supervisor, a co-worker or fellow volunteer would also suffice.

## What?

- Make sure to provide enough information beyond "Will you be a reference for me?"
- You do not have to ask your references for a formal 'letter of reference' unless explicitly requested by an organization.
- Most organizations will ask candidates only for the contact information of your references, so that they can contact them directly via phone or email to ask about you. Ask a Peer Helper about our reference page template (cecspeer@uoguelph.ca)

## When?

- Interviews can pop up unexpectedly. When you begin to search for a job or volunteer opportunity, ask the person if they would be willing to be a reference for you, if required.
- Asking for permission ahead of time is not only courteous, but by letting your reference know the types of roles you're targeting, they may suggest opportunities for you.

## How?

- Whenever possible, try to ask in person if someone will be your reference.
- If emailing, put "Reference for [Your Name]" as the subject line.
- Provide a few bullet points in an email of your key strengths and specific examples when you have used them. Better yet – send them a copy of your current resume for reference.

## Additional Tips:

- Follow up with your request tactfully and allow enough time for a response. Only follow up with an email request if more than a week has passed without a reply.
- When you are invited for an interview, send a description of the position to your reference and the documents you used to apply so they are aware of the organization and understand the key skills they should discuss.
- Send a thank-you note after a reference is provided and be sure to let them know whether you are offered the role.
- Try to pay it forward and keep in touch with those who help you. For example, if you read an article that is relevant to their personal or professional interests, forward it to them.

**Example:**

Hello Maria,

I hope that you have been doing well since we last met! [Try to mention a personal connection you have with the person. E.g. I thought of you when I was at a trivia night recently and we were quizzed about David Bowie, as I remember you being such a huge fan]

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be a reference for me during my upcoming summer job search. Volunteering at Pollination Guelph last spring affirmed my passion for environmental protection, and this summer I will be targeting my job search for roles in this field. If you feel you are able to serve as a positive reference, I would be happy to send you an updated version of my resume as well as a “cheat sheet” of specific examples you could refer to from my time at Pollination Guelph.

If you do hear of any positions that you think I would be a good fit or know of anyone in the field who would be helpful to chat with, I would love to hear any suggestions.

Thank you for considering this, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Your Name