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Where to include references on a resume

The answer to whether or not to put references on your resume can vary. The general rule of thumb when is actually to not include references on your resume. This is because employers are unlikely to reach to references until the interview phase, making the inclusion of them on an initial resume typically unnecessary. This does not mean that there are never scenarios in which you will need to know how to properly list references. For specific jobs and in certain situations, you may be asked or required to include a list of references within or alongside your resume. When you need strong references, it's important to structure them so that they stand out and impress the hiring manager, landing you the pivotal interview. In this guide, we will be covering the basics of how listing references on your resumes and when to know it's time to use references. Plus, we will discuss alternatives to sending references that can help you in situations where sending a reference may be a difficult task. How to List References on a Resume When it comes to listing references on a resume, there are two main ways you can go about it: 1) Make a Dedicated Reference Section Making a dedicated reference section involves making the space on your existing resume to include a short section with information on your references. 2) Create a Separate Reference Page (recommended) More often than not, job applicants who have chosen to include references on their resume will do so on an entirely separate page to be included with the resume. The second option of listing your references on a separate page is actually the preferred and recommended method. This is because references are not generally expected to be included on an initial resume and can take up unnecessary space that may be off-putting to hiring managers. Comparatively, a separate page of references gives the hiring manager the opportunity to look more closely at the information in the resume without becoming visually disoriented by too many sections. Hint: Not sure how to list other sections of your resume? Check out our Resume Guides to learn more about how to craft each section of your resume. When to Put References on a Resume So, if it is typically not expected to have references included on an initial resume, when is the best time to include references on a resume? Creating a reference section or page can be necessary depending on a number of situations, including: If the employer has specifically requested for references to be included in the job description If you have progressed further down the hiring process and have been asked to provide references before or after an interview If you are applying to governmental or institutional position, such as a federal job, that will require strong references and a background check Quick Tip: If you have impressive references, such as a company CEO or another recognizable figure, be sure to make these the most noticeable references and the first ones you list in your reference section. Overall, the golden rule is to wait to provide references until they are requested. Examples of References on Resumes Let's take a look at a few examples of references on resumes to learn more about common mistakes made when crafting a reference and how to correct them. It is highly important to include the necessary information to contact a reference – just a name and company is not enough. You should always include at least an official business number and an official business email in your references. Incorrect: John Doe CEO of Doe Corporation 123 Avenue Way, New York, NY Correct: John Doe CEO of Doe Corporation 123 Avenue Way (123) 456-7890 johndoe@email.com Always be specific when including the reference's job position or title. Don't just list the name of the company without the exact job title to go along with it. If you are unsure of a reference's job title, ask them before submitting your references to an employer. Incorrect: Jane Smith Works for corporate at Best Buy 42 Wallaby Way (123) 456-7890 Jane.smith@bestbuy.com Correct: Jane Smith Head of Marketing and Sales Best Buy 42 Wallaby Way (123) 456-7890 jane.smith@bestbuy.com Formatting a reference section will ultimately depend on if it is being created within a larger resume or separately on a different page. For on-resume reference sections, it is important to keep them as short as possible, potentially even excluding some of the basic information. If you are including references directly on a resume, you will likely only want to include one or two of your most relevant and impressive ones in order to not take up too much space. When making a separate page for references, you can simply stack them as you would jobs in a work experience section, placing emphasis on relevance in how the references are ordered. The Basic Reference Format: First and Last name Position or Title (i.e. CEO, professor of law, etc.) Company or University of Employment Company or University Address (not personal addresses) Company or University Phone number Company or University Email Address It is important when writing out your references that you do not include personal information about the reference, such as a personal cellphone number or email, without their explicit permission. It is best to just air on the side of caution and only include official and public contact information. There is, of course, optional additional information you may want or choose to include within a reference. This can include: Your relationship to the reference The length of time you worked with this reference Examples of experiences or projects that you and a reference shared work on that they can provide greater detail about As for formatting the rest of your resume, don't forget to check out our other guides in this series including How to Write the Perfect Resume and How to Choose the Correct Resume Format! What Not to Include in a Reference on a Resume We have already covered the basics of what to include and how to format a basic reference – but what kind of information should be excluded from a reference on a resume. Here is a quick breakdown of what kinds of information should be excluded from a reference: Any personal information Lengthy descriptions of your relationship to the reference Personal anecdotes or other non-essential information Too many references from the same company or employer You ultimately want to provide concise references that are easy to read quickly and clearly show why that person has been included as a reference. Take a look at these two examples on correcting reference errors: When including additional information, keep it to one line or less of the most relevant information. Additionally, keep additional specific and don't use vague wording such as "several years." Incorrect: Jack Frost CEO of Frost Inc. 21 East Avenue (123) 456-7890 jack@frost.com worked closely with Jack for a number of years and learned a lot from him that contributed to my skills today. Correct: Jack Frost CEO of Frost Inc. 21 East Avenue (123) 456-7890 jack@frost.com worked as Mr. Frost's personal and administrative assistant for 8 years. When making your list of references you plan of including, it is important to not include too many from the same company. You should only really include two references from the same company if each reference witnessed different skills or accomplishments of yours that the other did not. Incorrect: You worked at a corporate company in the communications department as a copywriter, and you have worked with both junior and senior level copywriters who you have included as references. Correct: You include only the senior copywriter as a reference, as they can better attest to your skills and their position is more impressive and relevant to the job you are seeking. How Many References to Add to a Resume Assuming you are using a separate, dedicated references page, the ideal number of references to aim for is between 3 to 4. In some cases, you may include up to 6 references, though generally you should limit yourself to a lower number unless specifically requested to do otherwise. When selecting your 3 to 4 references, it is important to keep a few factors in mind: Which references hold the highest prestige in their positions, making their inclusion on a references page notable? Which references can provide the most relevant information about your work ethic and skills for the job you are currently applying for? Which references do you have the strongest relationships with who will go above and beyond to recommend you to a hiring manager? As you are creating your list of potential references to contact, there are a number of different types of people you can consider including. It is important to keep in consideration how a reference can relate back to the job you are applying for, and whether their testimony of your work ethic and skills will be relevant enough for the desired position. Here are some common examples of who to include as references: Former employer or manager Supervisor or low-level manager Coworker, colleague, or team member College professor Internship supervisor Community member (typically used when a job applicant has limited references but has connections within the community who can validate their experience and skills) Business partners (this can be anyone you worked on a project with or shared a similar business experience with) How to Ask for a Reference Asking for professional references can be a bit nerve-wrecking, especially if your references are busy people. The key to asking for references is to be polite and concise in your request. A direct phone call is preferred for asking for references, but a quick email can work in a pinch as well. When asking someone to serve as a reference for you, it is important to consider their potentially busy schedule and give them a good time frame when to expect a call or email. This is another reason why it is important to wait to provide references until requested, as it will give you a narrower window of time to give to your references of when they will need to be on the lookout a hiring manager will contact them. Quick Tip: When you call or email to ask for a reference, this is a great time to confirm that the information you have is correct (such as their specific title and business phone number). Can People You Have a Personal Relationship with Be a Reference? It is generally advised against to include references that have a strong personal relationship with you outside of work (such as a significant other, parent, or sibling) as this can result in a biased recommendation from the reference. However, exceptions can be made in certain instances, such as if you worked within a family-owned business or if the reference worked directly with you for a long period of time. In general, however, try to avoid including references that are too personally related to you. Alternative Methods for Sending References If you are a new graduate or are returning to the workforce after some time away, you may not have many recent professional references to include in a resume. For recent grads, including one or two professors can be acceptable, but you will likely still need other references. Here are some examples of alternative references when you lack strong professional ones: Volunteers you have worked with Professors or teachers who have recently taught you Community members such as church pastors or mentors who can attest to your character Ultimately, the key to doing references right is to wait to provide them until they are requested by a hiring manager or potential employers. Once references have been requested, remember the following five takeaways that are key for rocking your reference section: Create a separate and dedicated references page to go along with your resume Provide all the necessary official contact information Avoid including personal information of the reference's Avoid including references who share too personal of a connection to you Include the most relevant or impressive references at the top of the page To learn more about all the elements of creating a great resume, check out our resume template designs and resume examples for inspiration! As you're applying to jobs, you may be wondering about the best way to submit your references. You may ask, "Should I include references on my resume or in my initial application materials?" The answer is, you should include references on a separate page. Most companies will ask for two or three references from a candidate, so it's always best to have at least three ready to go. Some prospective employers may request a certain mix of reference types, but generally, the people you would use as references for your resume are: Former managers – or your current manager if they know about and are supportive of your job search Former or current colleagues Professors you worked closely with – if you're earlier in your career and don't have many former managers If you'd be leading a team, you may be asked for a reference from a former direct report. For some client-facing roles, like account management, companies might want to hear from a former client or customer, so read up on the norms for your industry. (Read more about who to list as a reference here or – if you have less work experience – here.) Once you know who your references will be, you want to make it easy to submit them to employers when asked. You should compile everything you need into a reference sheet, one handy – and well-formatted – document that can expedite the hiring process in the final stages. When the time comes, you can attach your reference sheet to an email as a Word document or PDF file. Or you can simply copy and paste the information into the body of the email. On your reference sheet, you should list each reference with the following information: Name Current Job/Position Company Phone Number Email Address Reference Description: Write one sentence explaining how you know or have worked with this person, where, when, and for how long. (Check out the example below to see what this looks like in action.) There's no need to include your reference's home or work address – companies aren't going to be mailing them anything. If a reference expresses a strong preference for a certain method of contact, it's OK to put "(preferred contact)" next to that line on your reference list. To keep things easy for the hiring manager, it's also a good idea to include your own name, phone number, and email at the top of the sheet (see the template and example below). References for [Your Name] Here's one example of what your reference sheet might look like when you fill in our template: References for Monica Medina (999) 000-1111 Monica.medina@email.com Nicole Chiu Director of Engineering Sunshine Inc. (555) 123-4567 nchiu@email.com Nicole worked my direct manager from 2016 to 2018 when I worked as a software developer for Sunshine Inc. Kwame Smith Front-End Software Engineer Zapp Co. (111) 222-3333 kwamesmith@email.com Kwame is an engineer I collaborate with daily in my current position at Zapp Co. Dr. Carol Moore Professor of Computer Science University of Pennsylvania (123) 987-6543 cmoore@email.edu Carol was my professor in four different classes and my faculty advisor for my computer science degree. Keeping references off your resume is not only the standard now, it's also more thoughtful toward the people you've asked to speak on your behalf. By only submitting their names and contact information when asked directly (usually at the end of the hiring process), you'll know when a prospective new employer is actually going to contact them. This way you can give them a heads up, pass on any important information about the job or company you're applying for, and thank them for their help. It's standard to include former or current managers, as well as former or current coworkers with whom you worked closely, on your reference list. If you have never worked, your reference could be a former or current professor. First and foremost, you should understand that a resume and curriculum vitae (CV) are two different documents. CVs are mostly used in academia, medicine, and law, for example. With that said, references on a CV are also not the standard anymore. Unless the employer specifically asks for them in the job listing, there's no need to include them. Yes, typically employers ask for two to three references. The exact number may depend on factors such as the industry you're in, your role level, and whether you're a fresher or a seasoned professional. Always be prepared to provide the number of references requested. No, you shouldn't do it. It's not standard practice, and it's a waste of space on your resume. Employers already know they can ask for references and will do so if needed. It's not recommended if you're asked for professional references. When employers ask for professional references, they want to know more about your professional experience, work ethic, and performance. Unless you and your friend have worked together, they cannot provide that information. If you're a fresher, a professor, a mentor, or a leader of a community service or volunteer organization would be better choices for references. However, if you're asked for a personal reference, then you can list a friend. Amanda Cardoso contributed to the latest version of this article. Whether you're a first-time job seeker or someone who's thinking of switching careers, you know the importance of a well-written resumé. A well-written resumé is the breakdown of your entire professional history and your updated skills. But future employers want to see more than just your accomplishments, they want to know if you're the right fit for the job. That's where references come in. References are a short list of people who can speak to your skills, attributes, and character during the job application process. Your references should typically include your former colleagues, direct supervisors, previous managers and work mentors or, in the case of fresh graduates applying for an entry level position, an esteemed professor, career coach or academic advisors. Including references in your resumé is a way for your future employers to get a clearer picture of who you are as an employee. Think of it as a way for them to see your achievements through a more objective lens. Build a more effective resumé by learning how, when, and where to include references in your resumé. Should you put references on a resumé Unless the application specifically requires it, references aren't a necessary part of your resumé and should be kept to one page at most. Even in a two-page resumé, more valuable information could hold the space. Most people just skip it altogether or provide a list only when asked. Let's discuss the pros and cons of listing references and what you can do as an alternative. Pros of including resumé references The biggest benefit of including references in your resumé is that it will help your future employer learn more about your work ethic and character during the interview process. If given the choice to interview a job seeker without references or to review the references of a job seeker without an interview, Senior Adviser Claudio Fernando Aroz of a global executive search firm Egon Zehnder says, he'd rather pick the latter. References can also give your job application more credibility especially if your work history is a little lacking. This is especially important for fresh graduates who have had little to no job experience. Use your references strategically and include them when they benefit you. This could be when the job application requires it. Most companies won't ask for references until they're ready to make you an offer. However, you don't want to delay the hiring process by waiting until the last minute to send request letters to your potential references. Make sure to have your references prepared when an application requires you to include them or when a recruitment officer requests them. When you know an executive from your former company a strong word from someone higher-up could place you in the running for your desired position. Make the most out of your connections by including them as references in your resumé. When you've received an award or promotion in your previous employment If there was ever a time to flaunt your accolades, it's during a job application. Include supervisors or old bosses who were involved with or witnessed your promotion and any other recognisable accomplishments from your old job. When you have extra space in your resumé if you really don't have any more achievements to include, fill up the white space at the bottom of your resumé with at least three references. Make sure that these references can speak to your work ethic and skills and that they are involved in a career related to the one you're applying for. A curated list of references that highlights your talents, character, and prior job performance can make your resumé stand out during the hiring process. Cons of including references on a resumé On the flip side of the coin, you may opt not to include references in your resumé because they aren't necessary. They take up valuable space in a resumé that could be used for more details about your professional or academic history. There's also an issue of privacy as you'll be providing the contact information of your references to several companies throughout your job hunt. So when should you exclude references from your resumé? When you only have one reference or none at all If you don't have enough or an important reference, it's best to omit the section entirely. At best, it can make you look ill-prepared. At worst, it can make you look like someone without strong social skills or someone who has a bad relationship with your former employers. When you only have personal references Exclusively adding personal or peer references to your resumé doesn't provide a holistic view of your work ethic and skills. Friends and family have a tendency to be biased towards you and don't work with you, they won't be able to provide the details your future employers are looking for. When you have little to no space left in your resumé If the formatting of your resumé doesn't allow for space to include academic references in your roster. These references can speak to your academic ability and prowess. These can include: Professors Lecturers Thesis adviser Thesis panelists Personal references These refer to people who know you outside of work. A personal reference can speak to your soft skills and give a more holistic view of you as a person. They know how you balance your personal life with your career, your hobbies, and how you treat people socially. These can include: Colleagues Volunteer group members Longtime friends Pastor Professional vs. personal references Professional references such as a former boss or direct manager are what most job seekers go for and what employers usually expect. In a traditional work setting, this would usually suffice. However, if your future employers want to get a complete picture of you as a candidate, they may ask you for a personal reference. A professional and personal reference can be the same person. However, it's important to assess whether an exclusively personal reference can benefit your application. While examples above are provided, personal references can't just be anyone you know. There needs to be significance in all the details you list on your resumé. Have you worked together on an important project for the community? Can they speak positively to how you're qualified for the position in a way that a professional reference can't? If so, then they can provide valuable insights that your employers are looking for, and including them as personal references can benefit you. However, family members should be avoided as personal references as much as possible. Employers may express some concern that they are biased toward you, affecting your overall application. It's best to exhaust all other options before listing down family members as references. How to ask for references It might seem like it's as easy as messaging someone on Facebook and asking them to be your reference, but it takes a little more work than that. Remember, a reference is a personal favor that they're placing their name on, so state your intentions clearly and in a complimentary manner. Write a letter of request that gets straight to the point while remaining courteous. It's also important to give your potential references ample time to review your request and get back to you. No matter what their response is, always show your gratitude as they took time out of their day to let you know. Above all, don't list a reference without informing them first. It's bad form to assume they'll put in a good word without letting your references know that you've given out their contact information without their permission. Tips for getting strong references Build strong relationships with potential references It's always a good idea to make meaningful work relationships. Not only will this help you solidify a potential reference, but it will also broaden your network. This is also why it's best to stay on good terms with your previous employers, barring workplace harassment and illegal activity, of course. Share your job search goals with potential references Informing your potential references that you're actively job-seeking will give them time to prepare as well as remind them to set aside time for a possible call. Provide potential references with relevant information If they know exactly what you want them to highlight, then your chances of getting a strong reference go up. Follow up with references Whether you got the job or not, it's always best to follow up with your references after the application process and keep them in the loop. What to include in a reference list or reference sheet The rule of thumb is to have at least 2 to 3 references on a resumé and 3 to 5 on a separate reference sheet. Make sure that these are individuals who can speak to your skills and character and have been well-informed of what you're asking from them. For each reference, be sure to provide the following: Name Current position Company name Email address Mobile number Short description of your relationship Keep your reference list concise and easy to read. Avoid including your job references' personal information and strictly use their professional email and contact number Where to place your reference list on your resumé Your references are the last priority on your resumé and can be excluded if you choose to. If you'd like to include it in your resumé, it's best to place them at the very end. Always prioritise your employment history, academic background, professional background and related skills. Better yet, create a separate reference sheet that you can submit when requested. It can be formatted to match your resumé thematically and allows extra room for other references to be included. Resumé reference examples References in your resumé and in a separate reference sheet must be formatted the same way as the rest of your resumé. Match font, spacing, and colors for a more cohesive and professional look. Common mistakes to avoid when listing references Not getting permission from your references This is the biggest thing you should avoid as a job seeker. It's disrespectful of your reference's time and your relationship. Using the wrong format This is when your reference list in a way that's difficult to read. A reference list that's messily formatted can be difficult for your future employer to read and understand. Example: Alaya Company Chief Human Resources Officer Samantha Lopez (+63) 987 654 3219 Not providing enough information about your references If your future employers ask for your references, they need to know who exactly they're going to contact and how to do so. Incomplete information negatively reflects on you so make sure to provide sufficient details. Example: Andrew Garcia MS Shopping Center (+63) 987 654 3219 Providing too many details about your references Your reference list should be easy to read in the same font, so that the recruitment officer or hiring manager can get all the pertinent information in one glance. Overstuffing your references can be confusing, and unnecessary, and may risk your reference's privacy. Use a separate page with the same format to impress hiring managers. Mary Anne Ledesma Navarro Human Resource Manager Abakada LLC (+61) 428 399 202 I loved working with Teresa at Alaya Company. She's a 47-year-old single mom and was the one who got me my position as HR Assistant in 2017. She helped me become more familiar with the job. We share a love for cats and get along well with our other colleagues. Important things to consider References in a resumé can be beneficial to all job seekers who want their future employers to know that they're the perfect fit for the job. Although it's no longer a requirement, most companies still ask for a list of references so it's best to be prepared. Remember: Include references when necessary or when it benefits you. Your references should be well-spoken, be an authority figure, and work in a field related to the one you're applying for. Be courteous, and concise, and express gratitude when writing a letter of request. Make sure your references are well-informed before, during, and after the application process. Double-check that you have all the necessary information and that your reference list is well-formatted. Explore Careers section where you can #SEEK Better jobs! Get more resumé tips and tricks by downloading the SEEK app on Google Play or App Store. FAQs Are references necessary for every job application? No, you can opt not to include references in your job application if it's not specifically requested by your prospective employer. How many references should you include on a resumé? It's recommended to include 2 to 3 references in your resumé or 3 to 5 references on a separate sheet. Is it better to provide personal or professional references? Generally, professional references have a better understanding of who you are within the workplace and can provide a better testament to your work ethic and character while personal references can speak to your soft skills and who you are outside of work. You can provide a mix of both (e.g. two professional and one personal reference) if you think it will be more beneficial for your application. What should you do if you don't have any professional references? You may choose to submit personal and academic references instead of professional references. If you can't find any at all, it's best to place your focus on making your resumé look good as it is. Can you use the same references for multiple job applications? It's best to avoid applying for too many jobs as this can negatively affect your application. Consider having 7-10 references you can contact and shuffling them around for multiple job applications. Make sure that the credentials of your references are related to the field you're applying for. As long as your references are informed and agree with the situation, then go ahead.