Reference Letter Etiquette:
How to ask for a letter of reference

Disclosures and Conflicts of Interest

None
• Of note, I have been both a letter of reference recipient and a letter of reference writer
• Letter quality has varied

Learning Objectives

There are three overall objectives for this session
• Define and describe the different types of reference letters
• Understand how to develop professional references and ask for letters of reference
• Understand how to write different letters of reference
Different kinds of letter of reference

- For graduate school
- For residency
- For a new job: first job or next job
- For a promotion: academic or non-academic
- For an award or honor

What do these letters have in common?

- The letters need to be positive
- The letters need to include specific examples
  - Work product
  - Work ethic
  - Special accomplishments
  - Unique talents
- Most employers want to know how well you work with others as well as independently

How these reference letters differ

- What are the requirements or specifications of each request?
- Think about who can support you best for the role
- Do you know someone in a similar role who is approachable?
- For some high level academic positions (associate professor or above), references can be required from colleagues who you have not worked with directly in order to assess professional impact
What kind of reference is needed?

- Do not provide references unless asked to
- Review the number of references requested, prioritize who you think might be suitable, then have back up references in mind
- Review the kinds of references requested

How to find a reference

- The importance of professional relationships
- who can speak to your actual work accomplishments?
- Your day to day interactions?
- Your work ethic?
- Your value and strengths?
- Your growth potential?
- Compare you in a positive way to your peers?

Who to ask/who not to ask

- consider if confidentiality is needed
- obvious options: current and former managers, colleagues
- stretch options: AAPM chapter members, field service engineers, vendor representatives
- obvious not to ask
  - a parent, a sibling, your best friend (maybe an exception if in the field or a related one)
How to ask

- In person is best, phone call, email - match their communication style
- Reference letter template from newsletter article (Jan/Feb 2021 and HBR article part II, "the template")
- Explain importance of their opinion
- Do they have the bandwidth for the deadline? Ask with a long lead time if possible
- Leave them an out

If they say yes

- Provide a short, concise summary of their role in the position
- Request a letter of reference
- Provide the job description/requirements/focus
- Possibly a draft letter for reference or reshaped
- Remind them of prior praise or feedback on projects/accomplishments
- Be ready to show up for a phone call, a meeting, or an interview

Follow Up

- Send a thank you letter
- Send a follow up to share the outcome
See articles published in the AAPM newsletter

Resources

From the Harvard Business Review (HBR)

- How to Ask for a Reference Letter
- How to Ask for a Reference Letter, Part II: The Template

Resources

Sample Letters and Email Messages Asking for a Reference

https://www.thebalancecareers.com/asking-for-a-reference-2062928