

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

AAPM annual meeting 2021: Creative Science. Advancing Medicine.

Robin Miller, MS DABR FAAPM
Northwest Medical Physics Center



1

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



2

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



3

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



4

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



5

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 of 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



6

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



7

How to find a reference

The importance of professional relationships
• the kinds of professional relationships: transactional, transformative.

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?



8

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)



9

How to ask



In person is best, phone call, email – match their communication style



Flattery helps



Reference letter template from newsletter article (Jan/Feb 2021) and HR 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 "in out"



10

If they say yes



Provide instructions on where and when the recommendation is due



Provide a concise and up to date CV



Provide the job description/requirements/focus of the letter



Possibly a draft letter for reference or volunteer to edit however be cautioned that employers want to hear a different voice and can be sensitive to a copied writing style



Remind them of prior praise or feedback on projects/accomplishments



11

Follow Up



Send a thank you for the reference letter



Send a follow up to share the outcome



12

See articles published in the AAPM newsletter

AAPM Newsletter | November/December 2020
Volume 45, No. 4

PROFESSIONAL LETTERS OF REFERENCE: ADVICE FOR THOSE WHO NEED THEM AND THOSE WHO NEED TO WRITE THEM

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE (PROS) REPORT
Chetana M. Page-Robertson, MS, Bonner MD Anderson Cancer Center
Robin Miller, MS, Northwest Medical Physics Center

AAPM Newsletter | March/April 2021
Volume 45, No. 2

PROFESSIONAL LETTERS OF REFERENCE: How to Write a Letter of Reference

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE (PROS) REPORT
Todd Pawlicki, PhD, UC San Diego
Chetana M. Page-Robertson, MS, Bonner MD Anderson Cancer Center
Robin Miller, MS, Northwest Medical Physics Center

AAPM Newsletter | January/February 2021
Volume 45, No. 1

HOW TO ASK FOR A LETTER OF REFERENCE

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE (PROS) REPORT
Robin Miller, MS, Northwest Medical Physics Center
Chetana M. Page-Robertson, MS, Bonner MD Anderson Cancer Center
Todd Pawlicki, PhD, UC San Diego

AAPM Newsletter | May/June 2021
Volume 45, No. 3

LETTERS OF REFERENCE: BEING CONSCIOUS OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE (PROS) REPORT
Robin Miller, MS, Northwest Medical Physics Center • Todd Pawlicki, PhD, UC San Diego
Chetana Page-Robertson, MS, Bonner MD Anderson Cancer Center

13

Resources

From the Harvard Business Review (HBR)

Career Planning

How to Ask for a Reference Letter <https://hbr.org/2010/04/how-to-ask-for-a-reference-let-1-2>
by Jodi Glickman

Career Planning

How to Ask for a Reference Letter, Part II: The Template <https://hbr.org/2010/04/how-to-ask-for-a-reference-let-2>
by Jodi Glickman

14

Resources

JOB SEARCHING • JOB REFERENCES

Sample Letters and Email Messages Asking for a Reference

BY ALISON BRITTA | Updated May 10, 2020

Table of Contents

- Who to Ask for a Reference
- How to Ask for a Reference Letter
- How to Request a Written Reference
- Sample Letter Asking for a Reference
- Email Message Asking for a Reference
- More Letter Samples

How to Ask for a Reference

- Choose someone who knows you well
- Give them your resume
- Ask for the letter
- Be polite and wait
- Thank them

Why to Ask for a Reference

- Background information, including:
- Your education
- Your experience
- Your relevant skills

Why to Ask for a Reference

- Your education
- Your experience
- Your relevant skills

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

15