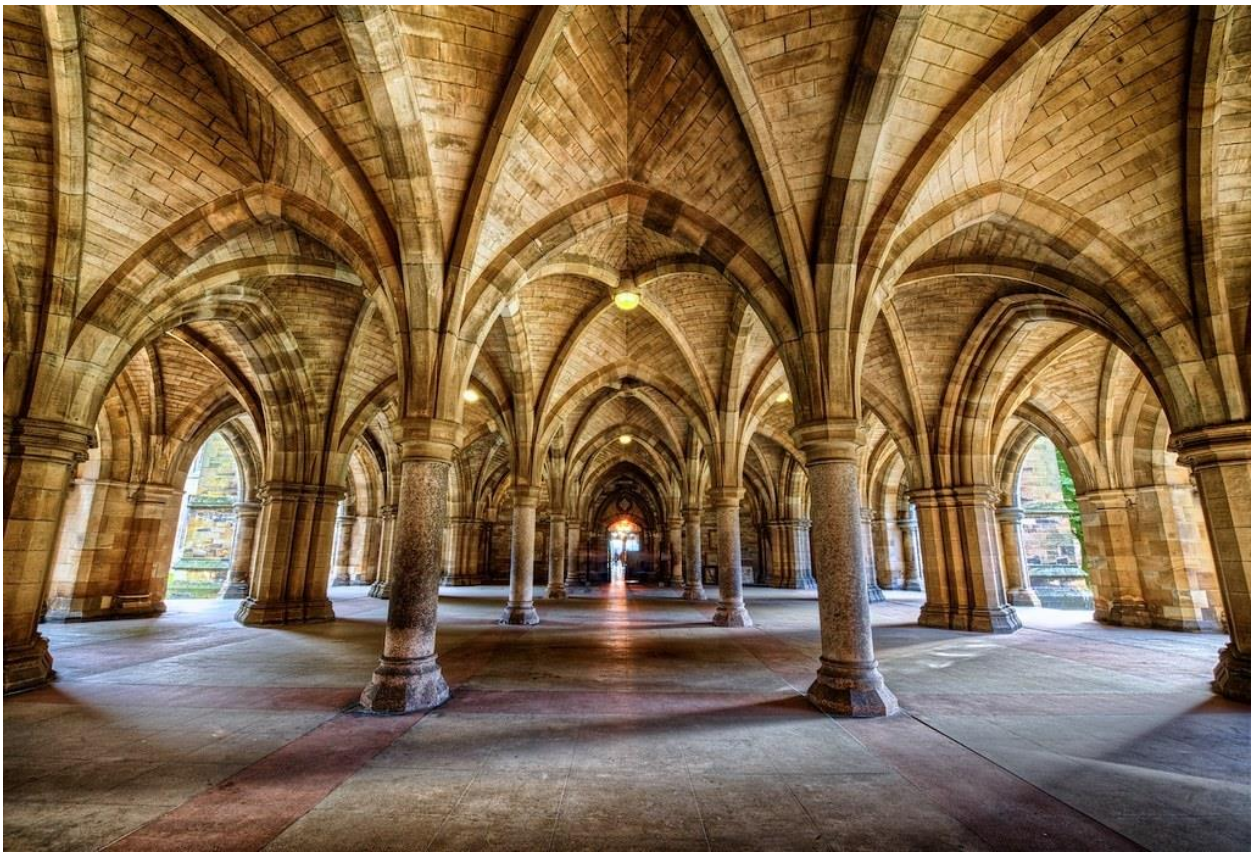


Requesting an academic reference

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Purpose of this guide

Chances are, you're reading this guide because you're preparing to, or are in the middle of, applying for a job or further study. Yay! Applying for new adventures can be really exciting, but the process itself can also be a nerve-wracking experience and, on top of this, asking for references can feel a bit awkward sometimes. So to help make this process a wee bit easier, we've put together this guide on the ins and outs of choosing referees and asking them for references.

Please note that this guide will not guarantee that you'll receive a reference from your preferred referee, but is intended to make the process of choosing a suitable referee and asking for a reference a bit easier.

Summary Checklist

1. *Think about what information you need your reference to cover and choose an appropriate referee*
2. *Contact them to ask their permission in advance of the application deadline*
3. *Submit a Student Reference Request Form to your referee*
4. *Discuss when and how the reference is to be provided with your referee*
5. *Submit the reference, or wait for your referee to submit it on your behalf*

Common Pitfalls

- *Not asking for permission to include someone as a referee*
- *Not choosing an appropriate referee*
- *Asking for too many references from one person and/or in too short a timeframe*
- *Not checking-in with a referee if it's been a while since you last spoke to them*

Why am I being ask to provide references?

In the job-hunting world, a reference is a document containing a description of your qualifications, experience, skills, and/or character of a job applicant and is provided by someone (a referee), usually, of your choosing. Organisations ask for references as a way of verifying the details you give within your application - organisations invest a significant amount of resources (e.g. time, money, people) when hiring new staff.

Think of the hiring process like choosing a holiday. You're more likely to choose a location, hotel, or airline with rave reviews over something with no reviews. In other words, you want to know

that reality will match your expectations before parting with your hard-earned money. Employers feel the same about hiring! They want to know that they are investing their resources in someone who will be worth their investment, and the reference helps take some of the risk out of the process for them.

From your side of the interview table, references are important because they serve as evidence of the things that make you a strong candidate. Remember that although you will be graduating from the University of Glasgow with a strong profile of knowledge and skills, all that employers will know about you is what you choose to tell them, so articulating your skills and experiences clearly is super important, and your references play a role in this by confirming what you say.

Who should I ask to provide an academic reference?

Though it might feel like the easiest part of the job application process, choosing your referees should involve careful planning and reflection. Your choice of referees will influence how much of your skills, experience and character your references will capture, and will determine how up to date the reference is, so they play a big role in showing how much (or how little!) evidence there is for the things you say in your application.

Here are a few things to consider when choosing how might be your best academic referee:

- **How many references do you need?** Most organisations will ask for two, occasionally three, references, and sometimes they will dictate where these should come from (e.g. an academic reference, current or most recent employer). If you choose multiple academic referees from the same School, consider using them to demonstrate a wide range of your experiences and skills (e.g. one to cover research experience, and one to cover your grade profile and general skills development)

- **What do you need your references to say?** An academic reference has the potential to capture your grade profile, skills development, research experience, and wider university involvement (e.g. club/society involvement, volunteering), but not all staff will be in a position to comment on all of these within one reference. Generally, our staff will only be able to comment on the things in which they have direct experience of your work (e.g. as a tutor, supervisor) or have access to information about it (e.g. as an Adviser of

studies or Year/Programme Lead). You should consider whether you need a very broad reference, to capture a range of skills/experiences across your degree, or whether you need it to capture a specific context, such as a dissertation project.

- **How recent will the information captured by the reference be?** Strong job applications tend to showcase the relevance and recency of a candidate's skills and experiences. Generally speaking, you should try to choose referees who can provide the most recent assessment of your abilities. However, there may be times when an older reference is better, for example if you're looking to capture a specific experience (e.g. a project you worked on a number of years previous) - however, don't just assume that the member of staff will be available to provide a reference, even if they gave their consent at the time, it's best to check-in with them again to discuss the reference. This is particularly important when you need to provide an academic reference after having graduated.

- **How many applications are you submitting?** Though it might seem like multiple job applications would only need one set of references to be written, the strongest references are ones which are tailored to each individual job. So if you're applying for lots of jobs at once, consider each job as requiring a fresh reference. Keep in mind that writing just one reference can take a significant portion of staff's time (e.g. 30mins to an hour), so it might not be possible for one staff member to provide you with all the references you require. It's a good idea to draw up a list of potential academic referees, so that you aren't always asking the same person and so that you have alternatives if a particular member of staff is unavailable.

How do I ask for a reference?

Now for the (seemingly) awkward part: asking someone to be your referee. The good news is that in the School of Psychology and Neuroscience we have a process that will help you to initiate contact with your potential referees and help minimise delays in the process:

Step 1 - Initiate a conversation with your preferred referee. Ideally, this should be in-person during office hours or a pre-existing meeting as it not only means you're likely to get a quick, if not immediate, response, but it means you can also discuss the content of the reference there and then in most cases. However, an email or Teams message will suffice to establish contact if

you are unable to visit your referee in person, but you should expect to follow this up with a meeting (in person or online) to chat further about it.

If you're unsure of what to say when asking for a reference, you could use the following template to initiate a conversation:

Hello Dr./Prof. X,

I'm [mention your relationship to the referee] and I'm applying for the role of [insert job title and organisation]. I would like to ask if you would be available to provide a reference to support my application.

Many thanks,

[Your name]

Step 2 - Submit a Student Reference Request Form. If your chosen staff member accepts your initial request, you can now submit a more formal request and provide all the necessary information your referee will need to complete the reference via the Student Reference Request Form.

Step 3 - Your referee prepares the reference, but keep an eye on your emails. Your referee may be in touch to verify or request more information, especially if there is anything you've asked them to comment on which they don't have direct experience or information of.

Step 4- Your referee submits the reference. Most organisations ask the referee to submit their reference directly to them, so there usually isn't anything you need to do at this stage. Occasionally, an organisation might ask the applicant to provide the reference letter as part of their application - this used to be the case for applications for further study or for funding, but it's becoming less common. Note that a member of staff will not supply a generic reference for a student to keep "on file" for use in other applications, as permission must be sought for each application (also because a tailored reference is always a stronger reference).

and tadaaa...academic reference complete!

What info does my referee need?

Once your chosen referee has agreed to provide a reference, they will need to know some information about you and the role you're applying for so that they can tailor the reference appropriately for your application. Generally, your referee will need to know:

- **details of the role or programme and organisation you're applying to** - this will help your referee to tailor their reference towards the role specifically e.g. by highlighting particular skills and experiences. Links or screenshots (if the advert will likely disappear from public view before references are contacted) of the position advert can be really useful
- **method of reference submission and deadline(s)** - it's helpful to let your referee know the deadline for your application, whether a reference is needed at the point of application or pre/post-interview, and whether the reference needs to be submitted within your application or directly to the hiring organisation. You may not have all of these details, as often the organisation will communicate expectations for the reference to referees directly.
- **any particular grades, skills, experiences you'd (not) like highlighted** - if you'd like your reference to include specific details let your referee know in advance so that they can factor this in at the time of writing. Similarly, let them know if there's anything you don't want mentioned or described in a particular way (e.g. disclosure of the specific title of a dissertation). Keep in mind that this may be at the discretion of the referee, as they will only be able to comment on things they have experience or information of in relation to your work.

How far in advance do I need to ask for a reference and when will it be completed?

When to ask someone to be a referee:

The references themselves aren't usually requested by organisations until after the application deadline (with some exceptions), but you will most likely need to provide names and contact details of your referees as part of your application. It's therefore expected that you have contacted your referee, and have their permission to include their details in your application - in fact, many organisations now ask you to check a box in the application form to confirm that you have indeed done this.

So, the earlier you get in touch with a potential referee the better, and we recommend getting in touch with your referee at least two weeks' prior to the closing date of your application. This will give you time to discuss the reference, with some buffer time in case you need to seek an alternative. It also avoid situations where you need to find a referee at the last minute.

When will the reference be completed:

Usually, you don't need to worry about when the reference will be completed because most references will be supplied by the referee directly to the hiring organisation. Sometimes references are requested soon after the application deadline, sometimes organisations ask for permission to contact your referees ahead of any interviews, and sometimes it happens after interviews. Some organisations might let you know when the references will be/have been requested, others might not be so transparent and you have to wait until you receive the outcome of your application. Unfortunately this part of the timeline varies a lot, and isn't something you, as the applicant, have control over so it's best to put it out of your mind for the time being.

In cases where a reference needs to be written and provided alongside or within the application (historically this has been mainly in applications for further study or funding opportunities), you should agree a date with your referee for when the reference will be completed. The date should be in advance of the application deadline with a buffer in case of technical issues.

What about last minute requests?

There may be circumstances which mean that it isn't possible for you to initiate contact with a potential referee 2 weeks in advance of the application deadline e.g. you happened to discovered the job or opportunity close to the deadline, your preferred referee initially agreed but has fallen through due to illness.

Whether and how an alternative referee can help depends on a number of things, including their availability to discuss the reference with, their capacity to complete the reference, and whether just their contact details are needed at that moment or the full reference, and is entirely at their discretion. Keep in mind that the University has policy to respond to student enquiries within 3 working days, so requests where the application deadline is within 3 working days are unlikely to be picked up in.

In this situation, it is recommended that you provide as much information as possible regarding your reference request and reason for the late request in your initial request email, so that, if picked up in time, the potential referee can assess quickly whether a reference will be possible.

Some useful resources:

- *UofG Careers, Employability and Opportunity*
- *Prospects - Applying for jobs*
- *Target Jobs - Careers advice*
- *Career advice from Jobs.ac.uk*

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For students:

If you are a student and have any questions or feedback about the material presented in this Sway guide please feel free to contact us via email or in office hours. Also, do let us know if you come across any broken links and I'll make sure they are updated. I'm also happy to hear suggestions on what further information or guides you think might be useful in supporting your employability.

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