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“A good reference is factual, evidence-based, relevant to the opportunity, and supported by specific examples.”



BEFORE YOU START

- ✓ Has the student shared their CV or application documents with you?
- ✓ Have you noted if there is a deadline? Some courses, e.g. medicine, cannot be considered without a reference.
- ✓ Have you had sufficient academic contact with the student to provide a meaningful reference?
- ✓ Does the reference request ask specific questions rather than an open statement?
- ✓ Is there a word count or specific instructions to follow?
- ✓ If relevant, has the student given explicit consent for mitigating or extenuating circumstances to be included?



LEGAL & DATA PROTECTION



References must be accurate, factual and not misleading.



Students may be able to access references under Data Protection legislation, depending on the circumstances.



If there have been extenuating or special circumstances ensure you have the student's explicit consent to discuss these.



Store references securely and dispose in line with the University's data retention policies.



WHAT TO INCLUDE

Use specific examples to evidence the student's performance, potential and relevant skills. Tailor the reference to the specific course, job or opportunity.

USE THIS CHECKLIST TO INFORM WHAT YOU MIGHT WRITE ABOUT:

- ✓ Programme of study and stage/year
- ✓ Predicted or achieved academic performance
- ✓ Academic achievement
- ✓ Research and analytical skills
- ✓ Critical thinking and analytical ability
- ✓ Written communication
- ✓ Oral communication skills
- ✓ Teamworking
- ✓ Reliability and professionalism
- ✓ Leadership or extracurricular activities
- ✓ Suitability for the opportunity



TYPES OF REFERENCES



Academic:
focus on academic performance and readiness for further study.



Professional programmes
(e.g. medicine, dentistry, teaching):
focus on their motivation for the profession, relevant experience and evidence of integrity and responsibility.



Employment:
focus on their transferable skills for the role.



IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS

- References should be fair, accurate and evidence based.
- Ensure you stick to facts only.
- If an application form asks specific questions, answer them honestly and accurately, ensuring any relevant information is not deliberately omitted.
- If you are unsure whether information relating to conduct, fitness to practise or disciplinary matters should be disclosed, seek advice from the Senior Personal Tutor before submitting the reference.



CAN I SAY NO?

You can decline to provide a reference if:

- ✗ You do not know the student sufficiently well.
- ✗ You cannot provide a fair and accurate reference.
- ✗ You do not have enough information to comment meaningfully.
- ✗ You cannot meet the deadline.



If you are unable to provide a reference please clearly communicate this with the student to allow them to make alternative arrangements before the deadline.



LIMITED CONTACT WITH THE STUDENT?

Be clear about the basis of your knowledge and avoid commenting on areas you cannot evidence.



TELEPHONE REFERENCES



Written references are generally preferable over telephone references.



Confirm the identity of the caller before providing information.



Keep notes of the discussion to ensure your words are not misheard or misinterpreted.



SUMMARY



- ✓ Give specific examples
- ✓ Tailor to the opportunity
- ✓ Keep to the evidence
- ✓ Be honest
- ✓ Decline if you can't support the application.



FURTHER READING



Acas: What employers can say in a reference: www.acas.org.uk/providing-a-job-reference



UCAS (Medicine, Dentistry and Teaching): [Writing undergraduate references for independent applicants](#)

