

Women in Science and Engineering Quick Tips on References

- Minimum of 3 references and recommend 5 or 6
- Keep this list up to date at all times.
 - Part of your “master CV or resume.”
 - Periodically connect and update as well as check contact information.
- Reference should know your work, be positive about you, have prestige & influence, connection to your target position, etc.
- Never use a person for a reference without first formally asking them.
 - Example “lines”
 - Do you feel you know my work well enough to write me a good recommendation letter?
 - Do you feel you can give me a good letter of recommendation?
 - You seem hesitant to write a letter, would you be comfortable sharing with me what your concerns are so that I can address them?
- Give them plenty of advance notice by asking ahead and when a letter is needed giving them as much time as possible. 2-4 weeks to write, edit and send your reference is a good parameter to strive for.
- Make it easy. Provide documentation – electronic versions in a pdf portfolio of sample papers and presentations, your resume, job description if there is a specific job, research statement, teaching statement, transcripts, list of awards, etc.
 - Side benefit – you are demonstrating your organizational skills. A worker characteristic that is highly valued by all employers. Don’t be surprised if it is mentioned in your letter.
- Talk about the logistics – timeline, number of pages (1-2), when you will mail your application packet.
- If you are applying to multiple positions, provide the full list with all relevant contact information and deadlines.
- If hard copy reference is required, provide an envelope with completed address information and a stamp.
- Ideally, each letter should highlight different aspects of the job you are focusing on.
 - They should all speak to your adaptability and capacity to learn quickly.
 - Should also include “transferable” strengths that are needed in any setting – problem-solving, organization, teamwork, initiative, ability to persuade others, risk management, etc.
- If you have two references that will address the same basic topic, one should be written by somebody outside of your academic department if you want the letters to have maximum impact.
- In the future, when you leave a place of employment on good terms, ask for a letter of recommendation. As time passes and people turn over, 10 years from now that person may no longer be with the company. And if they are, you can send them the letter they wrote at the time to “jog” their memory.
- Keep in touch – write a thank you, let them know the results of your search efforts, ask for advice, ask if they can help expand your network or point you in a good direction, congratulate them on a new article, and if they are savvy with social media networking invite them to your LinkedIn or other professionally oriented sites.