Setting yourself up to be above the rest.
Now is the time in your life to start planning for and thinking long-term, what will you need or remember 20 years from now?
Introduction

- Find someone you do not know and exchange the following:
  - First name (the one you prefer being called)
  - Your home department
  - Your advisor or lab
  - Two sentences about your research focus
  - Practice active listening and reflection
What is a reference

- Someone who **knows you well** and can discuss your **job related** qualifications and skills in an **enthusiastic, positive** manner.
- **Who???
  - Advisors
  - Dissertation committee members
  - Co-Authors
  - Supervisors & Bosses from employment, field work, internships, etc.
  - Others???
- Can provide verbal, online and/or written recommendations

Co-Committee members and leaders
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.

Types of Letters of Recommendation

- Professional, specific to a particular position.
- Professional, generic
- Provided by
  - People who know you from your academic work.
  - Employers
- Personal – speak to your character
You need a minimum of 3 references and I would recommend 5 or 6 depending on how broad your job search is. Keep this list up to date at all times. Should become part of your “master CV or resume.” Periodically check contact information.

- Reference should know your work, be positive about you, have prestige & influence, connection to your target position, etc.

- Ideally, each letter should highlight a different aspect of the job you are focusing on. They should all speak to your adaptability and capacity to learn quickly.

- It is helpful to have a few that focus on “transferable” skills or skills 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.

Exercise

- List key job duties for your targeted career.
- List 3 people who you feel can give you letters of reference/recommendation for your academic work, research, or other experience.
- Turn to the person next to you and share with them why you feel these are great choices for references.
- Reflect back what you heard.
Preparation:
- CV ready
- Information about the position desired.
  - If specific job, have all contact information and job description written down.
  - If it is a broad search, provide a list of places you are applying with all relevant contact and other information.
  - Is it online or hard copy.
- Clear, well-articulated understanding of your strengths and the positive ways to frame your challenges.
  - Prioritize the list in the order you would like them emphasized.

If hard copy reference is required, provide an envelop with completed address information and a stamp.

Make it easy to give you a reference. 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.
Exercise – Defining Your Strengths

- Being Clear about Your Strengths
  - Vs bragging
- Being bold, assertive
  - Vs being forward, aggressive
- Self-evaluate
- **Think ahead** about your strengths & weaknesses. Prepare with examples.
- Be detailed
You want letters to be

- Vivid
- Thorough
- Specific to the key points to be highlighted
- Strategic
- Compelling

Exercise: Turn to your neighbor and, in one sentence, vividly explain one of your strengths.
Example Statements

- Aside from being an outstanding synthetic chemist, with extensive experience in inorganic, organometallic and materials chemistry, Dddd is an excellent X-ray crystallographer and spectroscopist.

- In summary, Dr. Dddd has demonstrated his outstanding abilities as an Inorganic chemist by completing a series of highly difficult pieces of work. He has done a remarkable job supervising my laboratory, teaching undergraduates and graduate students advanced laboratory techniques.

Also note examples provided and job related details.
• Never use a person for a reference without first formally asking them.
• Provide them with all relevant contact information, job description, clear idea of your strengths and weaknesses.
• 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 for the reference. 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.
• 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.

• 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?
Once they have agreed

- Discuss the criteria you hope will be addressed.
- Remind them of examples of your exceptional work. Bring hard copies.
- Ask if there is anything you can do to help make it easier.
- Let them know you value their time and appreciate their efforts on your behalf.
- Make sure you have their full name, current title, organization, address, telephone and email information. If possible – personal information such as cell phone number or email are also helpful.
- Keep in touch.

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.
Online Options

- Time of transition
- SU has moved away from providing credentials services to an online service that students access on their own.
- It is called Interfolio and can be found at www.interfolio.com
- The website is fairly self-explanatory, but if students would like assistance, Pam Latham, in the career office would be happy to help.

New modalities vs tradition. May need to do it both ways for a while.
Can use printouts of material developed through online dossier, credentials and letter of recommendation services like interfolio.
In expensive - $19/yr, $40/3yr and $57/5 yr
Demonstrate Preparedness

- Your portfolio should have pre-prepared information in it for your referees so that they can give you a specific and positive reference.
- You may be asked to draft a letter of reference to be used by your referee to create the final reference letter. In preparation for this, you will need to draft a response that includes information about the following:
  - Your academic accomplishments and key experiences?
  - Your strengths?
  - Why you are a strong candidate for the particular position, post doctoral placement, etc.
  - Less tangibly, it is also useful for you to sketch out your own internal motivations for seeking a particular career path. What is it that drives you to be a professor, a researcher, a field scientist, etc.? What is your passion?
Questions and Follow Up

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