What is a list of references?

Your list of references (not to be confused with a letter of recommendation) is an important part of your job application package. It is never included as a part of your resume, but prepared as a separate one-page document. Typically, employers contact your references by phone or email after they have already interviewed you and are considering making you an internship or job offer. However, employers will often require that you submit a list of references along with your job application materials.

Who should I list as my references?

Anyone who knows you in a professional or academic setting (rather than a personal contact). You want to list people who will immediately recognize your name and convey enthusiasm about you. Beware of listing professors or public figures whom you do not know well. An informed person will serve as a better reference because s/he will be able to describe your skills and talents in detail and provide useful examples.

How many references?

If an employer has not specified a number of references, two to three names will suffice. Definitely do not list more than five (unless requested)! Remember: three very strong references are better than three strong and two mediocre ones, so be sure you have an idea of what each person will say about you. Strong references can make the difference between two equally qualified candidates, and a weak or neutral reference can defeat your candidacy.

What should I do before I draft my list of references?

You must ask every prospective reference if they are willing to recommend you. Unless you receive an enthusiastic "yes!" - bypass that person and move to another. If they do agree to be a reference, provide them with an updated copy of your resume and information about the types of positions you’re seeking. You also might mention what information you would like potential employers to hear about you (e.g., writing skills, conscientious attention to detail, willingness to tackle difficult projects, etc.).

How do I draft a list of references?

Below is a sample list of references for your review. While there is no single format for a list of references, make sure you follow these guidelines:

- The list should be no longer than one page and free of grammatical and spelling errors.
- While the order in which you list them is not important, it is common to list the most recent reference first (such as a law school professor).
- The header should be the same as your resume.
- Include the full name, title, address(es), email and telephone number(s) of each reference. It also should include a brief notation of how each person knows you.

TIP: Keep your references informed of your job search progress!
REFERENCES

Robert Smith
Professor of Law
University of California, Hastings College of the Law
200 McAllister Street
San Francisco, CA  94102
(415) 565-9999  smithr@uchastings.edu

Professor Smith was my Spring 2013 International and Comparative Law professor.

Sara A. Jones
Executive Director
Prison Law Services
P.O. Box 8798
Denver, CO  08790
(666) 825-2789  joness@pls.org

Ms. Jones was my supervising attorney during my Summer 2012 internship.

Mary J. Brown, Esq.
Huge, Huge & Large LLP
48 Embarcadero Center
Palo Alto, CA  94202
(650) 555-1212  brownm@hhl.com

Ms. Brown supervised my work as a paralegal from 2010-2012.