

Reference check form

Template version 2026.1. Free to copy and change. The current version, with notes on every question, is at verifyref.com/reference-check-template

1. Candidate and role

Fill this in before you contact anyone, so every referee for this role answers the same questions about the same job.

Candidate name

Role applied for

Hiring manager

Reference checked by

Date

Two things this role lives or dies on (e.g. unsupervised client contact, accuracy under deadline)

2. Referee details

Verify the referee independently before you take their answers seriously. A work email on the employer's own domain and a listed company phone number are the two cheapest checks you can make.

Referee name

Job title at the time

Company

Work email (on the employer's domain, not a personal address)

Phone

Verified how (company switchboard, LinkedIn, employer website)

3. Consent and disclosure

Written candidate consent comes first, every time. Record it here so the file shows when and how you got it.

Candidate consent received on (date, and in what form)

Referees named by the candidate (yes / no, and who added the rest)

Referee told how their answers will be used (yes / no)

4. Relationship and employment verification

Start here. If these answers do not match the candidate's own account, everything after them is worth less.

1. In what capacity did you work with the candidate, and were you their direct manager?

[short answer]

A peer or a friend answering as a manager is the most common reference problem there is.

2. What were their start and end dates, and their job title when they left?

[short answer]

Compare against the resume before you read on.

3. What were their main responsibilities?

[long answer]

Listen for scope that is smaller than the candidate described.

4. Why did they leave?

[short answer]

A mismatch with the candidate's reason is worth a follow-up call, not an automatic no.

5. Performance

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the quality and consistency of their work, and what sits behind that number?

[1 to 10, plus a comment]

The number stops a non-committal answer; the explanation is the part you actually use.

2. Describe a significant project or problem they handled, and what the outcome was.

[long answer]

Specific beats flattering. Vague praise here usually means limited direct contact.

3. Where did they need the most support or supervision?

[long answer]

Phrased as support rather than weakness, this gets an honest answer far more often.

4. How did they perform against targets, deadlines or service levels?

[long answer]

6. Working with other people

1. How did they work with their team, their manager, and people outside their department?

[long answer]

2. How did they take feedback or correction?

[long answer]

Coachability predicts the first six months better than almost anything else on this form.

3. Describe how they handled a disagreement or a difficult person.

[long answer]

7. Reliability, conduct and growth

1. Were they reliable about attendance, deadlines and commitments?

[yes / no, plus a comment]

Follow any hesitation with: can you give me an example?

2. How quickly did they pick up new tools, systems or processes?

[long answer]

3. Were there any formal performance or conduct concerns on file that you are able to share?

[long answer]

Many employers will decline this. A decline is not a red flag; an unprompted story is information.

4. Is there anything about the role we described that would concern you for this person?

[long answer]

This is why section 1 asks what the role lives or dies on.

8. The two closing questions

Ask both, in this order, of every referee. They do more work than the rest of the form combined.

1. Would you hire or work with this person again, and why?

[yes / no, plus a comment]

An unqualified yes is the benchmark. Hedging, a pause, or 'yes, but in a different role' is the finding.

2. Is there anything else we should know that I have not asked about?

[long answer]

Leave the silence. The most useful sentence in a reference check usually arrives here.

9. Your notes and decision

Record this while the conversation is fresh. Facts and direct quotes, not impressions.

Matches the candidate's own account (yes / mostly / no, with what differed)

Points to confirm with another referee

Outcome (clear / clear with notes / needs a further referee / do not proceed)

Completed by, and date

Keep these off the form

A referee may volunteer any of this. Do not ask for it, do not write it down, and do not let it into the decision.

- Medical conditions, disability, or mental health history
- Pregnancy, family planning, or parental status
- Religion or religious practice
- Age, race, ethnicity, or national origin
- Genetic information or family medical history
- Sexual orientation or gender identity
- Workers' compensation claims
- Union membership or activity
- Arrest records that did not lead to a conviction

Not legal advice. This list covers common federal ground in the United States; state, local and non-US rules add to it, and some jurisdictions limit what a former employer may disclose at all.