

When you are in the process of a job search, you will need to not only pay special attention to your resume and cover letters, but also to your reference list. It is not suggested to submit your references with your resume; however, any time you get called for an interview this list will need to be prepared and ready to be given to your potential employer. This list will need to include the name, title, address, phone number, and email address, if available, of your references. However, when you are preparing this list, how do you decide who to include and who to leave off? What is the process in selecting your professional references?

First, you should keep in mind that three references should be sufficient. There is no reason to list everyone you have ever worked with or to think one person is adequate to inform your potential employer of your qualities. Three is a good number unless the job specifications dictate otherwise.

When you begin considering whom to add to your list, remember this is a "professional" reference list; therefore, friends or family members should not be included, even if you are hard-pressed for references. The most obvious source of references are past employers or co-workers. However, you should be careful to only include people that you know will give you a good reference. The preferred reference is someone you have kept contact with, but either way, you should contact your reference beforehand to ask their permission to include them on your list.

Another possible reference source is professors if you have recently graduated. This is often necessary if you have limited experience. Professional association contacts are a choice also. Anyone that can attest to your abilities in a professional setting is a potential reference.

As you consolidate your list and begin selecting who will make the final cut, there are a few things to consider. How will a potential employer view the reference? Someone with a poor demeanor or that may be perceived negatively should be avoided. Also, someone that has limited knowledge of your qualifications should not be included. On the other hand, if you have a really impressive contact, they may be very beneficial. What will each contact say about you? If you have a particular reference that will speak very highly of you, they may be used as opposed to a mediocre reference. Also, as stated earlier, you need to speak to your potential reference to see if they mind the position and kind of feel out what they may say about you.

Once you have completed this preliminary groundwork, you should have the information necessary to choose the best three candidates for your professional reference list. You may consider sending a short thank-you note to your references just to show your appreciation.