



University Career Services

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## Reference and Recommendation Letters

### What is the difference?

#### Who writes reference or recommendation letters?

The term “**References**” usually applies to a job search while “**Recommendations**” refers to formal letters written to support an application for graduate school or a research position. Recommendation letters are written by an advisor or faculty member who is familiar with your academic work.

References and recommendations are rarely interchangeable. Begin cultivating references while you are a student and continue developing professional relationships with each new work experience.

If you have been out of college for several years and your academic contacts are not current, consider taking a graduate course or two as a non-degree student. Faculty may be willing to write recommendations for your graduate applications based on your more recent coursework.

#### Tips for Faculty or Employers when Asked to provide References or Recommendation Letters

Ask for input, including points to be emphasized in the letter. Students ought to provide forms, a resume, and updates on their accomplishments.

Set deadlines for requests and background information; indicate when you will be able to provide the letter.

Say no if you cannot or do not wish to recommend the student to an employer or academic program.

A template for faculty to use when writing a recommendation letter for graduate study is located on the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) website for your use:

<http://www.nacweb.org/about/public/formfacref.htm>

#### Tips for Students, Alumni, or Employees when making requests for Letters of Reference or Recommendation

Be sure to ask permission to use someone as a reference and be sure the individual has sufficient knowledge of your knowledge, abilities, skills, or accomplishments to write an effective letter. Former supervisors, other managers, and possibly trusted co-workers, but not family members or friends, may provide references.

Plan ahead; give references plenty of notice and enough time! Keep them informed regarding who is given their contact information and what to expect.

Provide a job or graduate program description, required forms, and updated information on your accomplishments along with a resume when you ask anyone for a reference or a recommendation letter.

Prepare a list of 3 – 5 references with contact information in a format that looks professional and matches your resume, to take to interviews and to provide when asked for your references.

Thank your reference contacts, in writing, after you have used them for references. Be sure to let them know the results of your search or application to graduate school.

#### On-line resources for additional information:

<http://careers.gmu.edu>, A-Z Index “R”

<http://www.som.gmu.edu/pace/References.html>

<http://www.rileyguide.com>, A-Z index “R”



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## References and Recommendation Letters Tips for Faculty

### Information to Obtain from Students:

- Ask for input, including points to be emphasized in the letter. Students ought to provide forms, a resume, transcripts, job or internship description, and updates on their accomplishments.
- Set deadlines for requests and background information; indicate when you will be able to provide the letter.
- A waiver form indicating whether or not the student waives his or her right to see the letter of recommendation.
- Say no if you cannot or do not wish to recommend the student to an employer or academic program.
- Enclosed find a template for faculty to utilize when writing a recommendation letter for graduate study. The letter is also located on the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) website for your use: [www.nacweb.org/about/public/formfacref](http://www.nacweb.org/about/public/formfacref).

### Useful Online Resources for Additional information:

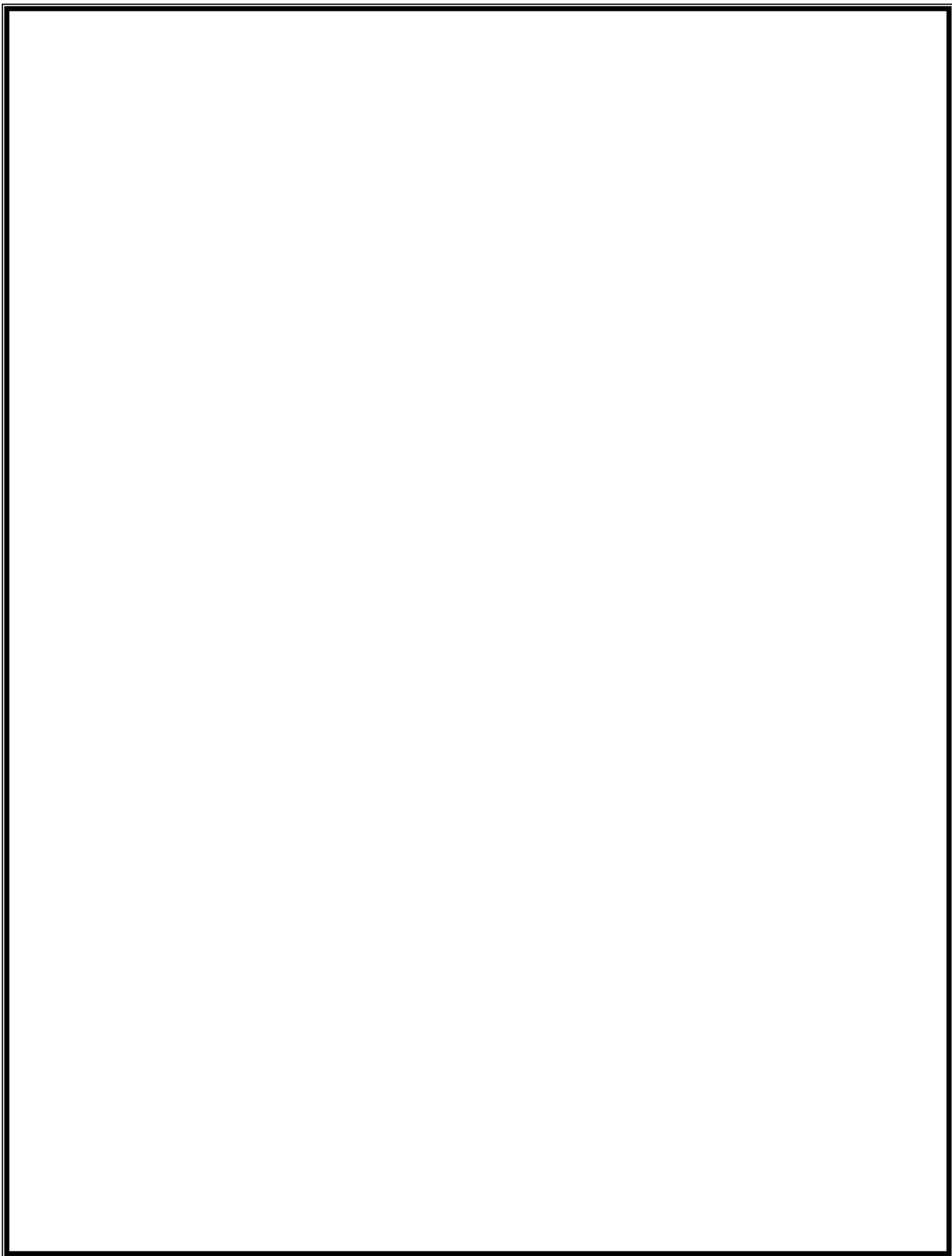
#### *Guides to Writing Letters of Recommendation*

- <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/Verba-recs.html>
- <http://www.writeexpress.com/reference-letter.html>
- <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/referencesrecommendations/>

#### *NACE Sample Faculty Reference Letter*

- <http://www.nacweb.org/about/public/formfacref.htm>

*Information provided by GMU University Career Services*



## NACE Sample Faculty Reference Letter

Dear **[Name of Employer]**:

This reference letter is provided at the written request of **[name of student]**, who has asked me to serve as a reference on **[his/her]** behalf. It is my understanding that **[name of student]** is being considered by your organization for the position of **[job title]**. Please be advised that the information contained in this letter is confidential and should be treated as such. The information should not be disclosed to **[name of student, if student has waived access]** or anyone in your organization who would not be involved in the hiring decision regarding this individual. Additionally, the information should not be disclosed to anyone outside of your organization without the consent of the student.

I have known **[name of student]** for the past **[number of months, semesters, years]** as **[he/she]** has taken the following courses which I teach: **[list courses, give brief description of content of course]**. As **[his/her]** professor, I have had an opportunity to observe the student's participation and interaction in class and to evaluate the student's knowledge of the subject matter. I would rate the student's overall performance in these subjects as average. This is evidenced by **[his/her]** grades--**[state the grades]**.

**[One or two specific examples of the student's performance may be appropriate.]** As part of **[his/her]** grade in **[name of course]**, the student was required to prepare a paper. The paper was designed to measure the student's ability to research, to analyze the results of the research, and to write. **[Discuss how the paper submitted by the student indicated to you the student's skills in these areas.]** Based upon this, I rate the student's skills competent but not excelling.

The one area in which the student performed above average was in oral communications. **[Give specific example to support this.]**

Based upon the student's academic performance and my understanding of the position for which the student is applying, I believe the student would perform (place overall evaluation here).

If you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

**[Signature of Faculty]**

**A Sample Employment Reference Sheet from the School of Management Career Services Office**

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Fairfax, VA 22030  
703-993-1000  
[gmason@mason.edu](mailto:gmason@mason.edu)

**References**

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