

Reference Check Guidelines

Reference checks are an important part of the selection process. At a minimum, prior to hire reference checks must be performed for a final candidate for any UW System institution position. Reference checks must include the candidate's most recent employer and any previous UW System institutions or state agencies where the candidate was employed in the past 7 years.

Checking multiple references demonstrates that reasonable care was used in the hiring process. Information from references through telephone calls or letters of recommendation is likely to prove very useful in evaluating a candidate's skills, training, experience, and ability to perform position duties. Multiple references allow supervisors to look for consistency among comments.

When seriously considering a candidate, who is a current or former UW System employee, hiring administrators, supervisors, or HR staff should conduct a reference check that would include current or former supervisors. Hiring administrators are encouraged to check relevant HR systems, such as Human Resources System (HRS), to access a finalist's available historical employment data.

The most useful references generally come from former supervisors. Peers and subordinates are also excellent references.

Telephone references are the most effective means of covering specific topics and asking follow-up questions to get more information about a candidate. However, letters of reference or questionnaires can also be effective. Take notes during the reference check and place them in the candidate's recruitment folder.

You can modify the Sample Reference Check Questions form ([Appendix 3](#)) to use as a guide to meet your particular needs. Remember to give candidates advance notice that you will be checking their references, which may include contacting people they did not identify as a reference. Hiring administrators, supervisors, or HR staff should contact current or former supervisors even if the finalist did not provide supervisory references. Use the following guidelines to conduct all telephone reference checks, regardless of whether the candidate is an internal employee or an external candidate:

- Introduce yourself and explain why you are calling.
- Ask whether it is a convenient time to talk.
- Briefly describe the position the candidate applied for.
- Confirm the relationship between the person giving the reference and the candidate.
- Verify basic information such as job title, duties, and dates of employment.
- Be consistent. Ask the same questions about all final candidates and weigh the information equally; what disqualifies one candidate should disqualify any candidate.
- Don't request information about race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, age or any other legally protected status.
- Avoid or at least limit asking questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no." Questions should be open-ended and relate directly to job performance.
- Don't ask a reference any questions that you're not permitted to ask the candidate.

One of the most common résumé deceptions is claiming to hold a degree that was never conferred or a license that was never issued. If a license or degree is important to the position, verify it's been conferred. If appropriate, call the state licensing board or the college or university registrar's office for confirmation that a critical degree or license was granted.