Most employers and graduate programs will require you to submit references at some point in the application process. We’ve compiled some general guidelines for both since grad schools can look slightly different from the professional world. If you have any questions about recommendations or a particular situation, please schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor through Handshake.

**GENERAL ADVICE**

- Always ask a potential reference permission to include them on your application
- Select individuals that you know well to be your references that are not your immediate family. These individuals should be able to speak highly of your skills, academic ability, and/or work ethic while also attesting to your character as a person
- Always hand write thank you notes to your references after they submit their materials or your process concludes saying that you appreciate them taking the time to advocate for you

**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A REFERENCE & A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION**

- **References**
  - Candidates are often required to provide a list of references during a professional job search who are not usually contacted until late stages of an interview process
  - Usually having 3 or 4 is recommended though not all may be contacted

- **Letters of Recommendation**
  - These are written on behalf of a candidate and submitted in tandem with an application to a graduate program, fellowship, or academic program
  - A letter's author may or may not be contacted after submitting a recommendation depending on an organization’s process

**FOR PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES**

- Employers may ask for references even before offering an interview, ensure that you have a professional document listing your references that visually matches the formatting of your resume and cover letter (see the example on the next page)
- Provide full contact information including phone number(s) and email
- When an employer indicates that they will be reaching out to your references, contact your references to let them know what the position is as well as why you applied
- Keep your references informed about offers, they are invested in your success!
FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

- Make sure that you give your reference enough time to write your recommendation (Ideally a month or more)

- Provide your reference with materials and samples that will inform their writing. This may include the following:
  - A current resume or CV reviewed by Malone Center Staff
  - Personal Statement(s)
  - A sample of works that display your skills (for a professor consider providing copies of work done for their class)
  - Information about the program or school that you are applying for with directions on how to submit the recommendation
  - A calendar of application deadlines

- A week before a due date, follow-up with references to ensure materials are submitted on time

- Keep references informed about acceptances to programs and where you ultimately choose to attend, they are invested in your success!

AVOID THESE PITFALLS

- Do not spring a request on a reference last minute

- Do not be unprepared to answer your reference’s questions about the position or program you’ve applied to

- Remember that if you’re asking Faculty to be a reference, they are not on campus regularly during the summer so an office number may not be the best option for contact

DON’T FORGET ABOUT LINKEDIN

- LinkedIn provides users with the opportunity to solicit recommendations from contacts who can vouch for your skillsets and work performance

- Pro-tip: Before wrapping up an internship, seasonal job, volunteer project or course, ask your supervisor/colleague/professor if they would mind adding a brief recommendation about you to your LinkedIn profile

- These recommendations not only increase your profile’s completeness score but also bolsters your credibility as a person and a potential candidate!
# Sample Reference Sheet

**George Washington**  
Greenville, SC | (864) 294-5555 | student@furman.edu

**REFERENCES**

**Dr. Lynne Shackelford**  
Professor of English  
Furman University Department of English  
864-294-2067  
lynne.shackelford@fuman.edu  
Relationship: Here I will describe briefly how I know this reference and will provide some clarification on how she fits into the narrative my other documents provide (i.e. can this reference speak to certain skills described in my cover letter or did we work together in an experience listed on my resume)

**Dr. Emmett Lathrop “Doc” Brown**  
Internship Supervisor  
CEO of DeLorean Future Travel, LLC  
(123) 456-7890  
doc.brown@delorean.org  
Relationship: Here I will describe briefly how I know this reference and will provide some clarification on how she fits into the narrative my other documents provide (i.e. can this reference speak to certain skills described in my cover letter or did we work together in an experience listed on my resume)

Adapted from ‘Remarkable Recommendations’ - Dr. Lynne Shackelford, Ph.D.