

Checking References, Credentials & Security Clearances

Before finalizing candidate assessments, it is essential to complete meaningful reference and credential checks. In some cases, security clearances may also be required.

Reference Check Tips and Questions

When conducted properly, reference checks provide the opportunity to corroborate information gathered from résumés and interviews, and are important in predicting future job performance.

Obtain permission from short listed candidates to contact their references before doing so.

To help ensure meaningful reference checks:

- Clarify the nature of the references' relationship with the applicant. Candidates have a vested interest in suggesting those who will speak favourably of their abilities, and it is important to contact references capable of providing a balanced perspective.
- It is useful to speak to current and former direct supervisors, as they are usually best able to provide meaningful information about job performance. Where an applicant has little or no formal, paid working experience, consider contacting others familiar with their technical and performance skills, such as those who have taught the candidate or served with them as volunteers. Should the committee wish to speak with an individual not on the candidate's reference list, permission must be sought in advance from the candidate.
- Conduct reference checks by telephone or in person. Experience has shown that referees' verbal assessments are usually more honest, open and reliable than written assessments. Furthermore, reference checks conducted by phone or in person allow for observing the spontaneous reactions of a referee in responding to questions. For example, hesitations, extended pauses, or changes in tone of voice may signal the need to probe further.
- After confirming general information about the candidate's experience with the referee, provide an overview of the job requirements. Ask the referee to comment on the candidate's demonstrated abilities for satisfying each of these requirements. For example, if inquiring about a candidate's level of initiative, ask for a specific instance when they showed initiative. Reference questions can be based on the candidate's answers to the interview questions to confirm their perspective. Do not discuss matters prohibited under the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) [1].
- At the close of the reference check, ask for an overall assessment of the candidate's demonstrated capabilities in relation to the job requirements. For example, would the referee hire this candidate for the position being filled, and why? What particular challenges or difficulties would they expect the candidate to experience if awarded the job?

[Here is a sample template for completing reference checks.](#) [2]

Checking Credentials

Besides checking references, hiring authorities have the right to request proof of a candidate's credentials, such as official academic transcripts, independent confirmation of graduation, or current eligibility for a provincial certification of some kind. This should be done prior to making a verbal offer.

Security Clearances

Security clearances may be required for certain University positions such as those that involve cash handling, those with broad access to University facilities (e.g. Campus Community Police Officers, many Physical Resources staff), or the well being of children (e.g. Child Care and Learning Centre staff, Athletics Summer Camp staff).

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Where the University has deemed security clearances to be a bona fide occupational requirement, candidates should be asked to acquire and provide a satisfactory criminal reference check as a formal condition of a written offer. Ideally, candidates should be informed of this requirement as early as possible in the recruitment process.

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Links

[1] <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code>

[2] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/system/files/9-Confidential%20Reference%20Form.docx>