References and Letters of Recommendations

References are the people who are willing to speak or write on your behalf to offer a recommendation for you for employment, graduate and professional studies, fellowships, etc.

Letters of Recommendation or Reference are the written documents submitted on your behalf recommending you for employment, graduate and professional studies, fellowships, etc.

In the United States, you have the right to see all of your credentials unless you waive your right of access. Most graduate/professional programs and some employers will request or require you to waive your rights to these letters. CCPA recommends that you have 3 – 5 letters of recommendations for which you have waived your right of access. The communications will be taken more seriously by readers if they know you have not seen them.

The CCPA offers a confidential credentials service to house your letters of recommendation. Details at: http://www.haverford.edu/ccpa/graduate_school/reference_letters.php

Tips on asking and enabling someone to be a reference or to specifically write a letter of recommendation.

1. Ask people who know you well and are likely to be in your court 100%.
   First and foremost you want to identify people who can speak / write enthusiastically about you from specific experience working with or supervising you. These experiences should be from a professional or academic settings ideally. If they can elaborate their praise for you with specific examples, their recommendation will be considerably more convincing.

2. Ask in person if at all possible. If not, then by phone. If that is not possible, then email. The more personal you make the request, the better.

3. How to ask? When asking, phrase your question to indicate that you are seeking an enthusiastic recommendation (not just a luke warm endorsement) and provide a comfortable option for them to decline if they need to or should. The request can be something along the lines of:
   “Do you feel you know me well enough to provide an enthusiastic reference / recommendation for me?” OR “Do you think you have enough available time to be an enthusiastic reference for me?” Think about it. You would rather have them say they don’t have the time or know you well enough than to write a luke warm, uninformed or lack luster letter! In general, you should allow 3 – 4 weeks minimum for letters to be written. The more advanced notice you give recommendation writers, the better, especially faculty who get many requests.

4. What to provide references once they have agreed to write or speak on your behalf.
   Again, try to meet with them in person. In written form (hard copy and/or electronic), provide a copy of your resume, an unofficial transcript (if reference is within the academic community), a short statement outlining your interests, a description of the kind of opportunity (ies), for which you are applying, AND the deadline(s) for each opportunity. If you are applying for multiple programs, provide a list of them with deadlines for each noted. If you are using CCPA’s credentials service, also provide the Letter of Reference Form with your portion completed.

NOTE: It is your responsibility to follow up politely to make sure the deadlines are met. If letters will be housed with the CCPA, you can ask us which letters have been sent to your file.
Providing a List of References

If you are asked to submit your references, you should follow the same tips for seeking your references. Once you have a list of people enthusiastic to go to bat for you, create a one page document with all of their contact information. Do not list references on your resume. A sample document follows:

Jane Doe
2222 Old Bay Rd., Waltham, MA 11111
jdoe@haverford.edu  222-333-4444 (c)

References for Jane Doe

Kim Benston, President
Haverford College
370 Lancaster Ave.
Haverford, PA 19041
kbenston@haverford.edu
610-896-1234

Michael Elias, Coordinator of Student Activities and Leadership
Haverford College
370 Lancaster Ave.
Haverford, PA 19041
melias@haverford.edu
610-896-2345

Judith Owen, Professor of Biology
Department of Biology
Haverford College
370 Lancaster Ave.
Haverford, PA 19041
jowen@haverford.edu
610-896-3456

John Smith, PhD, Post-Doctoral Fellow
Biomedical Research
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892
lgr@nih.org
301-222-3456