

Reference check request email template

Ask a candidate's references for a short call or written input, with consent and focused questions.

Updated October 15, 2026. Written and reviewed by the HRTally Research Team.

When to use this template

Reference checks come near the end of the process, usually after final interviews and before or alongside the offer. There are really two emails here: one to the candidate asking for references and confirming consent, and one to each reference asking for their time. Both are below.

References are doing you a favor, so make it easy. Tell them who you are, which candidate, what role, and how much time you need, and offer a short call or a written option. Ask about specific work behaviors tied to the job rather than general opinions. If you plan to use a third-party reference checking service, read the legal note below first, because that changes your obligations.

Version 1: Asking the candidate for references

SUBJECT References for the [Job title] role

Hi [Candidate first name],

Thanks again for your time with the team. We are moving into the final stage for the [Job title] role and would like to speak with [two or three] professional references.

Please send the name, title, relationship to you, email, and phone number for each person. Ideally, at least one should be a current or former manager.

By sending these, you are agreeing that we can contact them about your work. We won't contact your current employer without asking you first.

If you can send them by [Date], that would keep things moving.

[Recruiter name]
[Title], [Company]

Version 2: Writing to a reference

SUBJECT [Candidate full name]: reference request from [Company]

Hi [Reference first name],

[Candidate full name] is a finalist for the [Job title] role at [Company] and listed you as a reference. They mentioned you worked together at [Company] when [they reported to you, or other relationship].

Would you have 15 minutes for a call this week? Here are a few times: [Options]. If email is easier, I can send four or five short questions instead.

Anything you share will be used only for this hiring decision.

Thank you for your help.

[Recruiter name]
[Title], [Company]
[Phone]

Subject lines to try

- References for the [Job title] role
- [Candidate full name]: reference request from [Company]
- 15 minutes to talk about [Candidate first name]?
- Reference check for [Candidate full name]
- Quick reference request from [Company]

How to personalize it

- Ask the candidate to give their references a heads-up before you reach out.
- Prepare the same core questions for every reference so answers are comparable.
- Ask for examples, such as a time the candidate handled a difficult deadline.
- Thank each reference afterward with a one-line note.

Mistakes to avoid

- Contacting a current employer without the candidate's permission.
- Asking references about health, family plans, age, or other protected characteristics.
- Asking about prior pay where a salary history ban applies.
- Treating a vague or neutral reference as a red flag. Many companies only confirm dates.

Legal and compliance notes

If an outside company collects references for you, the report can count as an investigative consumer report under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, which requires a separate written disclosure and the candidate's

authorization. When you call references yourself, FCRA usually doesn't apply, but the same anti-discrimination rules apply to what you ask. More than 20 states and many cities ban asking about pay history, and that covers asking a reference too. See our background screening buyer guide for providers that handle these rules.

| When to send it

After final interviews, when you are serious about the candidate. Checking references for everyone in the second round wastes references' goodwill. Aim to finish all calls within three to four business days so the offer isn't delayed.

| Before you hit send

- The job title, pay range, and dates match what is in your applicant tracking system.
- Every placeholder in brackets has been replaced or deleted.
- Candidates who will be interviewed or assessed are told how to request an accommodation.
- Nothing in the message comments on age, family, health, or other protected characteristics.
- A real person is named as the contact, with a reply address someone checks.

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