

Reference request response email template

Respond to a reference request for a former employee in line with your policy.

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

When to use this template

Prospective employers often contact HR or former managers for references. Many companies limit what they share to dates of employment and job title to reduce legal risk. Others allow managers to give fuller references with the former employee's consent. Whatever your policy, apply it consistently, and make sure managers know who should respond.

Use one version when your policy is neutral references only, and the other when you are giving a fuller reference with written consent. Keep everything factual. Share opinions only when you can support them with facts. For a mortgage or rental verification, use the employment verification response .

Version 1: Neutral reference

SUBJECT Re: reference request for [Former employee full name]

Hello [Requester name],

Thank you for your request. Our policy is to confirm dates of employment and job title only.

[Former employee full name] was employed by [Company] from [Start date] to [End date].
[His/Her/Their] most recent position was [Job title].

This policy applies to every former employee and shouldn't be read as positive or negative.

[HR contact name]
[Title], [Company]

Version 2: Full reference with consent

SUBJECT Reference for [Former employee full name]

Hello [Requester name],

[Former employee full name] asked me to provide a reference and has given written permission for me to share it.

I managed [First name] from [Date] to [Date], when [he/she/they] worked as [Job title]. During that time,

[he/she/they]:

- [Specific, factual accomplishment]
- [Specific, factual accomplishment]
- [Observed strength, with an example]

I would be glad to speak by phone at [Phone].

[Manager name]

[Title], [Company]

Subject lines to try

- Re: reference request for [Former employee full name]
- Reference for [Former employee full name]
- Employment confirmation for [Name]
- Response to your reference request
- Reference: [Name], [Job title]

How to personalize it

- Follow one written reference policy for everyone.
- Get written consent before giving a full reference.
- Stick to facts you can support.
- Route requests through HR unless your policy allows managers to respond.

Mistakes to avoid

- Sharing why someone left or details of discipline without careful review.
- Different reference practices for different former employees.
- Comments about health, family, or protected characteristics.
- Negative references to someone who filed a complaint, which can be retaliation.

Legal and compliance notes

Many states give employers qualified immunity for good-faith, truthful references, but false statements can lead to defamation claims, and a negative reference given because someone filed a complaint can be retaliation. A few states, including Missouri, have service letter laws that require employers to give a written statement of employment details on request. Some states also prohibit blacklisting former employees.

| When to send it

Within two business days. Delays can cost a former employee a job offer.

| Before you hit send

- Final pay timing meets the deadline for the employee's state.
- COBRA or state continuation and unemployment information are included where required.
- IT access removal is timed with the conversation, not before it.
- Nothing in the message explains or argues the reasons for an involuntary departure.
- The departing employee knows who to contact after their last day.

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