

**SECTION VIII**  
**REFERENCE CHECKING**

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## REFERENCE CHECKING

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**Purpose:** *To validate claims made by candidates as well as perceptions of committee members regarding the candidate's job-related qualifications.*

1. Reference checking may be done by members of the Search Committee or the committee chair who will share the information with the Selection Committee only or reference checking may be done by the Selection Committee.
  2. References should be checked on all candidates selected as finalists.
  3. When contacting the reference, identify yourself and your reason for calling. Confirm that the person is willing to respond to your questions or if there is a better time to call. Assure the respondent that the information will remain confidential.
  4. Ask the same generic questions for all candidates. Follow-up questions related to a specific response made by a candidate in the application materials or interview process are encouraged.
  5. Make sure that questions are written, open-ended and probe only job-related criteria.
  6. Take notes.
  7. Confirm any potentially negative findings by making follow up calls to other sources before reporting such findings.
  8. Remember that information revealed as part of the reference checking procedure is, as a part of the hiring process, confidential and is to be shared only with those who are a part of the selection process.
- Include a minimum of 3 copies of reference checks you completed (and potentially reference checks the President, Vice Chancellor, or Chancellor completed during a second level Administrator or Faculty Interview).
  - You must contact at least one supervisory reference for all candidates.
  - The following is a sample reference check form, which may be modified.

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## REFERENCE CHECK SAMPLE QUESTIONS (FACULTY)

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Individual Contacted: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This is \_\_\_\_\_ of De Anza/Foothill College (or District).  
(Candidate's name) has applied for a Faculty position in \_\_\_\_\_. The  
individual selected for this position will teach the following courses:

\_\_\_\_\_.

This individual is also expected to participate fully in department activities, and all activities that support student learning and student success.

1. What was (candidate's) period of employment?
2. How effective do you think \_\_\_\_\_ will be as an instructor in this discipline?
3. How long and in what capacity have you known \_\_\_\_\_?
4. How would you describe his/her interactions with students?
5. Can you describe his/her most outstanding quality as a teacher?
6. Are you aware of innovative teaching strategies used by this candidate?
7. What department activities has \_\_\_\_\_ been involved with?
8. How does \_\_\_\_\_ maintain currency in the discipline?
9. Is this person involved and active in student access and success, programs, issues and activities? How does this person evaluate that he/she is effectively helping all students in his/her classroom to learn?
10. How would this person resolve a conflict with another faculty member in the department?
11. Would you recommend \_\_\_\_\_ for this position?
12. What is \_\_\_\_\_ greatest strength?
13. What is \_\_\_\_\_ greatest weakness?

Reference Checker \_\_\_\_\_

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## REFERENCE CHECK SAMPLE QUESTIONS (ADMINISTRATORS)

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Individual Contacted: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This is \_\_\_\_\_ of De Anza/Foothill College (or District).  
(Candidate's name) has applied for a Managerial position in \_\_\_\_\_.  
The individual selected for this position will teach the following courses:

\_\_\_\_\_.

This individual is also expected to participate fully in department activities, and all activities that support student learning and student success.

1. What was (candidate's) period of employment?
2. If (candidate) did not report to you, what was your working relationship?
3. How long have you worked with/known (candidate)?
4. What was (candidate's) reason for leaving your company? (If supervisor)
5. How would you describe (candidate's) punctuality?
6. How would you describe (candidate's) honesty, reliability, and integrity?
7. Describe (candidate's) ability to handle pressure. Can you give me an example?
8. Describe (candidate's) ability to organize, prioritize and manage time.
9. Describe (candidate's) ability to handle conflict.
10. Describe (candidate's) ability to work as a team member.
11. How would you rate (candidate's) communication skills?
12. Please describe (candidate's) work ethic.
13. Please describe the quality of (candidate's) work.
14. What do you consider (candidate's) key strengths?
15. What would you consider to be (candidate's) areas for improvement?
16. How would you describe her/his leadership, managerial, or supervisory skills?

17. Does he/she communicate well orally and in writing?
18. How do you rate his/her ability to plan short-term? Long-term?
19. Did he/she make sound and timely decisions?
20. Did he/she work effectively with management, subordinates and peers?

Reference Checker \_\_\_\_\_

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## REFERENCE CHECK SAMPLE QUESTIONS (CLASSIFIED)

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Individual Contacted: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This is \_\_\_\_\_ of De Anza/Foothill College (or District).  
(Candidate's name) has applied for a Faculty position in \_\_\_\_\_. The  
individual selected for this position will teach the following courses:

\_\_\_\_\_.

1. When did (candidate) work for your company? Could you confirm starting and ending employment dates? How long and in what capacity have you known (candidate)?
2. How effective do you think \_\_\_\_\_ will be in an \_\_\_\_\_ position?
3. What was his/her position? Can you describe the job responsibilities?
4. How would you describe his/her interactions with other employees (management and co-workers)? Can you describe this person's experience working as a member of a team?
5. Can you describe his/her most outstanding quality?
6. Are you aware of innovative work strategies used by this candidate?
7. How does (candidate) maintain currency in the discipline?
8. How would this person resolve a conflict with another staff or faculty member?
9. Would you recommend (candidate) for this position?
10. What is (candidate's) greatest strength?
11. What is (candidate's) greatest weakness?

Reference Checker \_\_\_\_\_

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## **CHECKING WORK REFERENCES**

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It becomes more and more difficult to obtain references on potential employees. Many employers hesitate to be candid in giving references because such candor can result in lawsuits by the ex-employee. On the other hand, an outright lie to the prospective employer can also precipitate legal action if the employee were to cause damage to the new employer. Therefore, you must give and solicit references very carefully. If you take the time to do so prudently, you can gain valuable information in the hiring process.

The same legal restrictions apply to reference checking as apply to interviewing - you cannot probe into such potentially discriminatory factors as marital status, age, disability, religion, and national origin. Confidentiality is always a must.

Prior to contacting the reference, make a list of questions that you will ask or use the Reference Check Format and identify the key concepts you will be listening for in the response. Certain questions may be tailored to fit a particular applicant. If several committee members are making reference calls, agree on the job-related questions before the calls are made.

When you make a call, identify yourself and the position you hold. Tell the caller that the applicant has applied for position x at De Anza/Foothill College and provide a brief description of the faculty assignment. Call a person who has been a direct supervisor of the applicant or a colleague/peer who has knowledge of the applicant's professional work experience. Do not attempt to get information secondhand. Assure the contact that you will keep your discussion confidential. Ask if they are free to discuss the applicant. If not, make arrangements to call back at a more convenient time. Offer to have them call you back if you sense the person doubts the legitimacy of your call.

Try to establish rapport. Many times a free exchange of information occurs when the individual you are calling identifies with your position, department, campus, or some other mutual point of interest. Tell the person about the position you are filling so that an evaluation can be made in relation to the specific job.

Start with the obvious. Verify dates of employment and type of work done. These are easy to answer, so there is no pressure on the respondent. Then proceed with more revealing questions. Let them talk freely. Follow up and probe for additional information if you sense the contact is reluctant to discuss certain factors. Be alert for obvious pauses. Be sure to cover all the questions on your list. Don't hang up until you are sure that you know the opinion of the person called. Frequently you will receive ambiguous answers.

The person called may give very little useful information. One technique that often works is to summarize the conversation by making either of the following statements:

“I take it that you don’t recommend the applicant for this position,” or  
“I take it that you highly recommend the applicant for this position.”

One poor recommendation should not automatically disqualify an applicant. Keep digging. Always check more than one reference. Quiz the other references on the points made by the negative reference but be careful not to identify the other reference.

### **Note on Giving References**

When asked for a reference on a current or former employee, limit the information you give to actual inquiries and to job-related data. Make only factual statements about job performance and responsibilities that you have directly observed. Try not to speculate on how someone may function in a new job. Do not discuss personal, family, and other non-relevant factors.

When dealing with subjective areas, such as quality of work performance and professional competency preface your remarks with qualifiers such as "in my opinion."

If you don't know the answer, say so. Be sure that the information in the reference you give is not motivated by personal animosity; that it is factual and accurate. You can be protected from libel suits if you are acting within the scope of your duties, if the reference is made in "good faith" to someone with a legitimate need to know, if it is based on fact, and if it is balanced.