



Ward & Uptigrove
Human Resources Solutions



Reference Check Questions

March 2026

Reference Check Questions

About this tool:

This tool provides tips to ensure your reference checking process is confidential, compliant with current law, and gets you useful information to make an informed hiring decision.

When to use this tool:

We recommend that you reference this tool whenever you are planning a reference check when considering a new hire.

How We Can help:

- Ask us about other tools to help you make an informed hiring decision:
 - DISC
 - Background checking (criminal, credit, driving)
 - Skills testing
 - Credential verifications



How to contact us:

For further discussion or assistance, please reach out to:

✉ HRresults@w-u.on.ca

☎ (519) 291-3040

wardanduptigrove.com/hr-solutions

Disclaimer:

The content provided is for general informational purposes only and is not to be considered legal advice. While believed to be accurate at the time of publication, Ward & Uptigrove does not guarantee accuracy over time. Ward & Uptigrove is not responsible for links to external resources which users' access at their own risk.

Reference Check Questions

Before the Call:

- Obtain consent from the candidate. All candidates have a legal right to privacy. **Do not contact references without their permission.**
 - o Do not reach out to individuals the candidate has not provided.
- The best references are preferably work-related, i.e.: customers, co-workers, former supervisors and bosses.
 - o Avoid contacting a current employer unless the candidate has explicitly given permission.
- Prepare 5-12 well crafted questions that are specific to the job opening. See question bank provided below to help filter best practice questions.
- If interviewing multiple candidates for a position, utilize the same set of reference questions.
- Become familiar with the candidates' resume.

During the Call:

- Introduce yourself. Provide your Name, Company, and job title.
- Let them know that the applicant has listed them as a reference.
 - o Introduce the job and its main purpose to help them answer your questions.
- Be sure to take detailed notes of your discussion with the reference and their responses to questions.
- Always verify the relationship.
- Be respectful of the reference's time.

After the Call:

- Compare notes, look for consistent themes across references.
- Keep it confidential.

Best Practices:

- Ideally three references, two-work/volunteer related, 1 in a direct Supervisory capacity.
- Reference information should be kept confidential and not shared with the candidate or others.
- Do not prompt questions that could be considered discriminatory or violate employment laws, i.e., race, marital status, religion.
- Add other questions specific to the technical skills and experience required for the job. Adjust the following questions to reflect the position you are filling.

Reference Check Questions

Questions:

1. Where did you work with the applicant?
2. Did the applicant report directly to you?
 - a. If no, what is/was your relationship with them?
3. What was/is your title? *(if not already disclosed)*
4. How did you find this person's work performance? Please rate their skills on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 being poor and 10 being excellent.
5. Describe this person's ability to learn? Can you provide an example of something they had to learn?
6. How did this person work under pressure or in stressful situations? Do you have an example?
7. Please comment on this person's trustworthiness and honesty. If there were any negative issues, please elaborate.
8. Please comment on this person's attendance and punctuality. If there were negative issues, please elaborate.
9. How did this person respond to feedback or constructive criticism? How would you recommend we provide them with feedback?
10. If you were to provide an area of strength for the applicant, what would it be?
11. Do you have any suggestions for areas of development or support that they may require?
12. Describe this person's communication skills i.e.: verbal, written, listening. If you can provide an example.
13. How do they deal with conflict and with conflict resolution? Can you provide an example?
14. How would you describe their leadership style? (if the position is for a manager or supervisor)
15. Would you rehire or work with this person again? If no, why?
16. Would you recommend them for this position?
17. Any further feedback or comments to help them be successful in a job with us?