

Sample Reference Checking Questions

There are many questions that can be asked of references. These questions below are likely to elicit substantive and material information about the applicant as well as information that could be warning signs or red flags to an applicant that could be potentially violent and/or dangerous.

If the Reference was a Superior of the Applicant

1. How did they meet the challenges of the role and manage the pressure of the job?
2. Were there any workplace conduct or ethical incidents caused by this applicant when they worked for your company? Please describe.
3. Did you evaluate (name's) performance? Can you speak to her/his strong and weak points? What was noted as needing improvement during this performance review?
4. Is the applicant eligible to be re-hired and would you re-hire them? Why/why not?
5. What skills would you have liked to see the applicant develop to reach their full potential?

If the Reference was a Coworker of the Applicant

1. What were the easiest and most challenging aspects of working with the applicant?
2. Did s/he get along well with management and co-workers?
3. How did the applicant handle conflict? How about pressure? Stress?
4. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share with me?
5. Do you believe that the applicant is qualified for the job they are applying for at my company? What, specifically, qualifies or disqualifies them?

If the Reference was Managed by the Applicant

1. What were the easiest and most challenging aspects of being managed by the applicant?
2. Did s/he get along well with management and co-workers?
3. Do you think that the applicant has any challenges or shortcomings at work or any areas that should be improved?
4. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share with me?
5. Would you recommend this applicant? Why/why not?

The Magic Question for Any Reference

1. What is the applicant's greatest strength and weakness?

Reference Checking Reminders

- Set the tone with the reference from the beginning, including letting them know about how long the call will take.
- Ask open-ended, specific questions
- Provide the reference your contact information
- Keep the conversation focused and all questions must be job related.
- The questions should be designed to gain insight into the applicant's past work history and performance.
- Be careful about questions that might cross the line into territory protected by law.
- Do not read anything into the reference's inflection. You do not have enough context to judge a stranger's tone of voice. They may have a monotone voice or is having a bad day.
- Describe the job position and duties that the applicant is applying for.

Questions that Should Never be Asked During Reference Checks

- Personal, federally protected Information
- Health and disability-related questions
- Credit history and/or score
- Family ties and future plans



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