

Sample Reference Check Questions

- What was her/his position? Can you describe the job responsibilities?
- Did (name) miss a lot of work? Was s/he frequently late? Were there any issues you are aware of that impacted her/his job performance?
- Did s/he get along well with management and co-workers?
- Was (name) promoted while with your company?
- Did (name) supervise other employees? How effectively? If I spoke to those employees, how do you think they would describe (name's) management style?
- How did (name) handle conflict? How about pressure? Stress?
- Did you evaluate (name's) performance? Can you speak to his/her strong and weak points? What was noted as needing improvement during this performance review?
- Would you rehire (name) if the opportunity arose?
- If I describe the position we are hiring for to you, could you describe how good a fit you think (name) would be for the position?
- Can you describe this person's experience working as a member of a team?
- Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to share with me?

1. What were the responsibilities of the position the candidate had while working at your company?

This question will help you to compare and verify the position that the reference is describing, with the description that was given to you by the candidate.

Before asking the next question, offer the reference a brief but specific description of the position the candidate is being considered for. Focus on the three top-priority responsibilities to enable the reference to provide specific feedback on each.

2. Do you think the candidate is qualified to assume these responsibilities? Why or why not?

The reference will probably offer specific characteristics about the candidate that lead him/her to believe that the candidate could effectively assume the role. If the reference simply responds by affirming that, in his or her opinion, the candidate is qualified, probe by asking, "What specific qualities or personal characteristics cause you to feel this way?"

Prior to asking the next question, tell the reference that you will be responsible for managing and supporting this person in the position. You are, therefore, interested to know what management style the candidate responds best to. Then ask:

3. How would you describe your management style?

Again, probe to discover what specific management behaviors the candidate responds well to -- and compare differences in your management style from the one being described that may make a difference in how you interact with this employee.

4. How did the candidate perform with regard to _____ ?

Whatever dimensions of job performance you feel are important should be inserted here. Questions relating to the quality of work, the ability to handle pressure or willingness to take the initiative or skill-related questions such as organizational or communication skills should be asked at this time.

5. Is this person a team player or does he or she excel by working alone?

Although teamwork is highly regarded by most companies, a person who is more independently directed may be what your position calls for. Determine, based on your assessment of the job, whether an interactive or independent work style is important for success -- and regardless of the answer, probe to determine whether the candidate demonstrated respect for other employees' contributions and a willingness to consider others' opinions.

6. What was the candidate's attendance record? Was the candidate on-time and dependable?

What is appropriate attendance at one company may be cause for dismissal at another. Be sensitive to extenuating circumstances that may have contributed to poor work attendance, such as illness or family problems. What you are attempting to determine by asking this question is whether this candidate assumed responsibility to show up for work and on time.

7. What areas of development were communicated to the candidate and how did he or she respond?

This question is a good way to get information regarding performance weaknesses that may not have otherwise been volunteered by the reference. Listen carefully as the reference describes how the candidate responded to performance improvement needs and direction.

8. What are the candidate's three strongest qualities?

You may have received various direct and indirect responses to this question but by asking it at the end of the conversation, you provide the reference with an opportunity to highlight the characteristics that stand out in terms of the candidate's past performance.

9. What was the candidate's reason for leaving the position?

This question should verify the reasons that the candidate provided for leaving his or her past job during the interview. The reason a candidate leaves a position can also help you in determining whether your position will give the candidate what he or she is looking for in a new position.

10. Would you rehire this candidate?

This final question is a defining one. Based upon the response and your evaluation of the other information provided by the reference, this will help you answer your most critical question,

"SHOULD I HIRE THIS CANDIDATE?"



Western Washington University

TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK GUIDE

Table with fields: Applicant Name, Position Applied For, Person Contacted, Title of Person Contacted, Phone #, Firm/Organization, Reference Checked by, Date.

<Applicant> is being considered for employment at WWU as a <Position Title>. You were listed as a former employer. [Applicant] has signed a release form that authorizes the release of the following information. or on a 0 to 10 scale (0 being the lowest scale and 10 the highest), how does s/he respond to pressure?

Basic Sample Reference Check Questions--Below are basic sample reference check questions:

- 1. Verify applicant's employment dates stated on resume or application.
2. Verify applicant's most recent job responsibilities.
3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is poor, 10 is excellent), how did he/she live up to her/his responsibilities?
...
21. Did you ever have to discipline for gross misconduct or violation of company rules?

Advanced Sample Reference Check Questions--Below are sample reference check questions:

- 1. How would you describe her/his leadership, managerial, or supervisory skills?
2. Does he/she communicate well orally and in writing?
3. How do you rate his/her ability to plan short-term? Long-term?
...
7. How well did the individual manage crisis, pressure or stress?

"Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. Is there anything else that you think I might find helpful in making a hiring decision?"