

Office of Career Planning's Guide to Creating a Reference File '08

1. Starting a Reference File

You must start the file yourself in your junior or senior year. Prior to your junior or senior year, it is a good idea to get employer references but keep them yourself. There is only one form needed to establish your file. You must complete this Reference File Release form and return it to the Career Planning Office. Forms are available

Reference letter forms, Confidential and Non-confidential are available in the office or online.

2. Number of Letters

The file should contain a maximum of 10 pages (3 to 5 letters are usually sufficient). These include reference letters from faculty, sponsor teachers, employers, and advisors (or student leaders) for campus activities.

We have forms for you to give the individual writing your reference. One form is a confidential form and one preserves your right of access. For off-campus employers, ask for a "To Whom It May Concern" letter on their stationery.

3. Resumes and Transcripts

Resumes and transcripts are not included in your Career Planning file. You send resumes to employers yourself, and only the Registrar maintains transcripts. You may want to get a transcript and make copies which you may use if the employer does not ask for an "official transcript".

4. Copies of References

We will duplicate your entire file for your own records, except references where you have waived your rights of access (confidential), at the cost of \$4.00 (or 5 file copies for \$15.00) up to 10 pages maximum (\$8.00 for 11-20 pages).

While we will copy individual references for \$0.15, we have approximately 10,000 files to maintain and prefer that you wait until your file is complete and get a copy of the entire file.

NOTE: The \$.15 fee will only be applied to individual letters IF the request is done in person at our office. This is due to the fact if we have to mail

even 1 reference the \$4.00 fee is required to cover materials and mailing costs.

5. Sending Your File

When you want your file sent to an employer or graduate school, we require a written request with your name, address, phone, class year and the name and address of the person to whom you want the file sent. A Reference File Request form is available online. Print or write carefully.

Enclose \$4.00 for each mailing of your file (or \$15.00 for 5 mailings). Make checks payable to SUNY Potsdam. DO NOT telephone us with mailing requests unless it is an emergency. If a mailed request will miss the employer's deadline, call during regular business hours with your request. Also, you can request that we fax your file to the employer. The cost to fax a file is \$5.00 for up to 10 pages and \$10.00 for 11-20 pages.

REQUESTS WILL NOT BE COMPLETED UNLESS PAYMENT IS INCLUDED WITH THE REQUEST. REQUESTS ARE COMPLETED WITHIN 2 BUSINESS DAYS OF RECEIPT OF REQUEST.

6. File Requested by an Employer

When an employer asks us to send your file, we will send it right away and send you a bill with the name of the employer receiving your file. If the references don't arrive in time for your interview, phone our office and we'll fax the references to the interview site, or read them over the phone to the interviewer, if necessary.

7. Married Students and Alumni

Some, or all, of your references may be in your birth name. Advise us of both your married and birth name so we can locate your file when it is requested. Beyond that, it is a good idea to put your maiden name on your resume in parentheses so the employer will also make the connection. For example, Mary Westville would have Mary (Smithers) Westville on her resume.

8. Asking Faculty for References

Faculty have hundreds of students in difference courses at different times. Writing references is something they expect to do, but it is not an easy task. You can help.

Don't assume that a person will write a reference for you. They may not have enough exposure to your work to write a reference. Ask if they feel they have observed you enough to feel comfortable writing a reference. If they agree to do it, be sure to thank them. It is a good idea to also send them a thank you note when you receive the letter and keep them updated on your progress. Besides the written recommendation you should also ask if you may use their name and phone number if you are asked to do so by a potential employer.

Make your request in person. It is a good idea to give the professor a resume, a brief written statement of the courses you took from him/her, any special projects or other accomplishments involved and your career goals. If you are asking for a reference from a professor who hasn't taught you since your freshman or sophomore years, this information is important. If your goals are unclear or varied (many students have a number of different but equally important goals), mention characteristics you know will be a part of whatever career you choose. Let the Career Planning staff assist you with this. We can provide you with reference forms for faculty and staff. Forms are also available on our website.

If you are planning to go to graduate school, you will usually have reference forms supplied by each school. Alert the professor to this and ask if he/she would be willing to write a duplicate one on the Career Planning form. This is good insurance. Your plans may be delayed for some reason and you apply to another grad school several years from now. When you need the reference the professor may not be available, due to sabbatical leave or other reasons. With the Career Planning form on file, just advise the graduate school of the situation and ask if you can have your file sent from the Career Planning Office.

9. Asking Employers for References

The best person to ask is usually your immediate supervisor, the person who can support her/his observations with credible examples. You may also want to add someone in higher authority at your place of employment.

Some large corporations will not give written references. In that case, see if your supervisor will agree to be a telephone reference for you. If he or she agrees, put a sheet of paper in your Career Planning references file with a message similar to this:

"Company policy at Zumwak Corporation does not allow written references for summer employees.

My supervisor, Ms. Joan Jones, has agreed to be telephoned as a reference."

(Give the work or home phone number or both, according to the supervisor's preference.)