

Recruiting Guide: Conducting Candidate Reference Checks

Before any offer of employment is extended, the Hiring Manager should identify who will be conducting reference checks on the final candidate(s). In job postings, we ask that candidates list 3 professional references we may contact, 1 of these should be a current or previous supervisor. These references should include former supervisors and colleagues who have had direct professional interactions with the candidate.

You must let a candidate know you are contacting their references before doing so to confirm the contacts and/or request additional contacts as needed.

Step 1. Plan

Before initiating reference checks, create a plan outlining the process and timeline. Prepare a set of open-ended questions that encourage detailed responses and job-specific experience. Focus on the candidate's work ethic, skills, and overall suitability for the position.

Examples of effective questions include:

- Can you confirm the candidate's job title, dates of employment, and your professional relationship to the candidate?
- Can you describe the candidate's work ethic and reliability?
- How would you describe the candidate's approach to teaching?
- Did the candidate demonstrate strong communication and interpersonal skills?
- Did the candidate show a willingness to learn and adapt to new situations?
- Would you rehire or recommend this candidate for this position? Why?

Be sure to keep questions job-related. You cannot ask questions that would be illegal to ask the candidate directly (i.e., age, marital status, etc.), the SUNY Morrisville Interview Questions – Sample and Unlawful guide is a great support for this. If you are hesitant to ask any questions, connect with the recruitment officer first! We are here to guide you.

Step 2. Contact Professional References

Reach out to the individuals listed as professional references by the candidate.

During the reference check conversation, practice active listening. Pay close attention to the reference's tone, enthusiasm, and choice of words. Take detailed notes to ensure accurate documentation of the reference's feedback. Be sure to evaluate the information obtained by the reference carefully; if a negative comment is received, see if it is validated by other references.

Step 3. Send Feedback to Recruitment Officer

Maintain accurate records of the reference check process, including the names of the references contacted, the questions asked, and the responses received. Document any areas of concern or noteworthy feedback. This documentation is essential for future reference and decision-making.

If applicable, never tell a candidate that the reason for rejection is based on a poor reference. This violates the reference's confidentiality!

Reference Check Template

This guide can be used as a template to complete reference checks!

Name of Applicant	
Position Title	
Name and Title of Reference	
Phone Number	
Date	
Person Conducting Reference Check	

Identify yourself and your position and tell the reference you are calling from SUNY Morrisville. Explain that (Candidate Name) is a candidate for the (Position Name) and has them listed as a reference. Ask them if they have a few minutes to talk. If not, ask for a date and time that is convenient for both of you.

Question 1: Can you confirm the dates of employment and position for this candidate, and talk to me about your professional relationship to the candidate?

Question 2:

Question 3:

Question 4:

Question 5:

Question 6: Would you rehire or recommend this person for this position with SUNY Morrisville? Why?

Final: Is there anything we did not discuss which would have relevance to this individual's candidacy for employment?