

# HOW TO GET A GREAT REFERENCE FOR A SCHOLARSHIP

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Scholarship applications usually, although not always, require at least one reference. The reference is an important part of the application and students should be strategic when deciding who they will ask to be their referee. When the scholarship committee is considering two equally good applications, it may be the reference(s) that determines who wins the award.

## Who should you ask?

A referee (a person who provides a reference) should be someone who knows you well and can speak with knowledge about your character, activities, and experiences. *Note: a referee cannot be a family member or a friend.*

Your referee should have known you for a year or more, and relatively recently (for example, within the last two years). They should have, or have had, some amount of regular contact with you in some capacity so they can comment on aspects of your character such as responsibility, integrity, work ethic, leadership skills, etc.

Ideally, they should be able to give specific examples of when you have demonstrated the kinds of skills and qualities the scholarship is looking for. Generally speaking, the more specific the person can be when providing your reference, the better. It is also preferable—and sometimes required—for the referee to put their reference on letterhead from their place of work/business/organization.

## Academic references

Sometimes the application will specify what kind of person is required to give the reference. For example, if it requires an academic reference, that usually means a teacher, or perhaps a guidance counsellor or a principal. It's best to ask someone with whom you've had some recent experience. So, for example, opt for a Grade 11 teacher rather than a Grade 9 one.



It can also help to align your referee with the type of scholarship you're applying for. For example, if it's a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) scholarship, ask a science or math teacher. If it's a leadership scholarship, ask a teacher from a leadership related class, e.g. Leadership 12, or a teacher who has seen you take on a leadership role in class, e.g. be a group leader/spokesperson.

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It could also be beneficial if the teacher knows you from a club or sport as well. For example, if you're applying for a science-related scholarship try to get a science teacher who is also your school's robotics team supervisor. Or, if you're going into an arts-related program with an eye to eventually apply to law school, try to get your English teacher who is also your school's debate club supervisor. The referee can then speak with more authority on your character and experience and provide more specific details on them.

## Other kinds of references

If it doesn't specify who or what kind of position your referee needs to hold, then you can choose from anyone (other than friends and family) who you feel would give you a great reference. Examples of referees include a coach, a direct supervisor at a paid or volunteer work position, a youth group leader, a music teacher, a church leader, etc.

## How and when to ask for a reference

It is **your responsibility** to ensure your referee has everything they need to give you a great reference.

Many people are busy and it's likely your referee is a busy person with many responsibilities. It is up to the student requesting the reference to give the referee all of the information they need, and to provide it for them in a timely manner so they are able to do their best for you.



You can ask for a reference in person, by telephone, or by email. However, if you ask by phone or in person, you should always follow it up with an email so the person has the information in writing. It also serves as a reminder for them.

How far in advance should you request a reference? **Two to three weeks** is usually a good amount of time. Most people you ask will agree to give you the reference, but sometimes a person is unable to do so. In this case, you'll need to ask a second person. You should always have a backup referee, just in case.

Many people like to help young people reach their goals, so try not to be intimidated by asking someone to be a reference for you. Sometimes it's even considered part of their job to provide students with a reference.

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## *Sample script to ask for a reference*



Please see the following page for a sample script of how to ask for a reference via email.

## *Materials to provide to your referee*

Although it's not guaranteed, it's highly likely the person you ask will say, "Yes." So, when you ask be prepared to give them the items they will need to provide the reference. Here are the items you should give to your referee:

- A copy of the scholarship application, or a link to it online. Indicate where they can find the reference instructions and tell them the deadline to submit the reference.
- A copy of your resume/activities list
- Any other information you feel would be helpful for them to get a better overall picture of your skills and experience. However, don't send them everything under the sun; only provide information that is specific to this purpose.

Make sure to follow-up with a short thank you message if they agree to provide a reference. Tell them you'll send a reminder to them about 3 days before the deadline. Put this date in your calendar and send the reminder on that date. Some referees need a reminder.

Let them know you will inform them of the result if you're chosen for the scholarship. Referees love to get this news; let them share in your success!

## *Another consideration...*

Do you use social media? If so, ensure your social media is free of any kinds of posts or pictures that could negatively affect your ability to get a favourable reference. Although many referees (and scholarship judges) don't check the profiles of scholarship applicants, some might.

Remember, when you ask someone for a reference, you're asking them to vouch for you -- for your character and your abilities. They're putting their reputation on the line to help you reach your goal, so be respectful of that. Do a social media audit and clean up anything questionable on all of your accounts.

*Good luck!*

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## Email script for requesting a scholarship reference

*Address the person in a professional manner.*

Dear Coach Wilson,

*Explain why you're contacting them.*

I am applying for the TD Leadership Scholarship and I'm writing to ask you to provide a reference for it.

*Describe the most important criteria of the scholarship so the referee knows what to address in their letter.*

This scholarship is for students who have helped make their community more inclusive, and who have used innovation and initiative to make their community a better place for others.

*Point out one or two of the best ways you have demonstrated the criteria of the award.*

As you know, for the past two years, I've taken on some leadership positions on the dance team and I'm hoping you can tell them about how I organized the team to put on the "Dance-Ability" workshop and performance for students with disabilities.

*Attach a copy of the application or provide a link to it. Point out the referee instructions and give them the deadline to submit their reference.*

I have attached a copy of the application. The information for referees is highlighted on page 2. The deadline to submit the reference by mail to the organization is April 1.

*Attach a copy of your resume or activities list so they get an overall picture of your activities and experiences.*

I have also attached a copy of my resume so you are aware of the other activities I participate in.

*Give your phone number for contact as well as email.*

If you have any questions, please contact me by email or at 999-444-5555.

*Thank them and ask them to get back to you by a certain time so you have time to ask another person if they decline.*

I truly appreciate you taking the time to consider my request. Please let me know if you are able to provide the reference by March 5 so I have time to ask someone else if you are unable to assist me.

*Provide your email address and phone number below your name (this is normally where people look for this information).*

Sincerely,

Charlene Johnson

[Charlene.Johnson18@gmail.com](mailto:Charlene.Johnson18@gmail.com)

999-444-5555