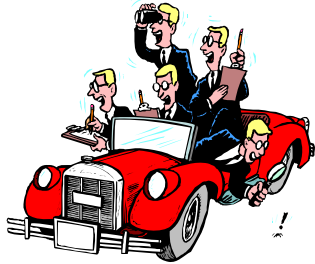


Reference Checking



Importance of Topic

- 96% of organizations check references (Burke, 2005)
- Academia: Letters of recommendation are used by nearly all universities
 - Student admissions
 - Faculty hiring
- Very little research

Definitions

- **Reference check**
 - The process of confirming the accuracy of information provided by an applicant
- **Reference**
 - The expression of an opinion, either orally or through a written checklist, regarding an applicant's ability, previous performance, work habits, character, or potential for future success.
 - Content and format are determined by the employer or university
- **Letter of recommendation**
 - A letter expressing an opinion regarding an applicant's ability, previous performance, work habits, character, or potential for future success
 - Content and format are determined by the letter writer

XXXXXX
8213 Summerdale Avenue
Chicago, IL 60610

Job Objective

Supervisory or management position with a progressive organization

Professional Strengths

- Extensive management experience
- Award-winning sales and promotional skills
- Active in the community
- Excellent construction, remodeling, and maintenance skills

Professional Experience

Owner - PDM Contractors - Chicago, Illinois

Owned and operated a successful general contracting and remodeling business. Responsibilities included bidding for jobs; supervising construction and remodeling; hiring, scheduling, and supervising employees; and handling all financial and accounting duties.

Manager - Kentucky Fried Chicken - Waterloo, Iowa

Responsible for managing three KFC restaurants. High level of performance demonstrated by huge increases in store profits.

Management Trainee - Nunn-Bush Shoes - Springfield, Illinois

Responsibilities included hiring, scheduling, and supervising employees; maintaining inventory; and selling shoes. High level of performance led to several promotions and commendations.

Ambulance Attendant - Palm Mortuary - Las Vegas, Nevada

Grocery Bagger - IGA - Chicago, Illinois

Community Activities

Waterloo, Iowa

- Named "Best Jaycee Chaplain" in Iowa
- Member of the Merchant Patrol

Springfield, Illinois

- Vice president of the Jaycees
- Ran largest Christmas parade in central Illinois
- Named *Outstanding First Year Jaycee* and *Third Outstanding Jaycee Member* in Illinois
- Member Junior Chamber of Commerce

Chicago, Illinois

- Precinct Captain for the Democratic Party
- Member, St. John Berchmans' parish bowling team
- Organizer of annual Snowtillion (church winter dance)
- Directed the annual Polish Constitution Day Parade
- Member of the Moose Lodge

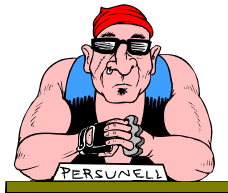
Education

Diploma
Northwestern Business College

Why Check References?

- Check for resume fraud
- Find new information about the applicant
- Check for potential discipline problems
- Predict future performance

Resume Fraud



Checking for Resume Fraud

- **Why Check?**
 - 25% of resumes contain inaccurate info
 - over 500,000 people have bogus degrees
- **Obtaining Missing information**
 - unintentional omission
 - strategic omission
 - deceptive omission
- **Verifying Information**
 - truth
 - error
 - embellishment
 - fabrication
- **Alternative methods**
 - bogus application items
 - social security reports
 - hire professional reference checkers

Do you want a University Degree without studying? An Income that starts off high? The Opportunity to just get in the door?

We can help. We have a LEGAL Offshore University that issues valid Degree's in any subject for a small fee.

Our Degree's work worldwide. Here's an example.

"I had no experience at all in Marketing. I applied as a marketing consultant for a company. My University Degree & reference letters (issued with degree) got me the job in 1 week! My income is now \$90,000 a year vs. \$25,000. They still have no idea about not going to University, but love me at work for my creativity. You guys rock!."

- Jared T. xxxxxx
Miami, Florida

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Registrar Office
Kathy Helm



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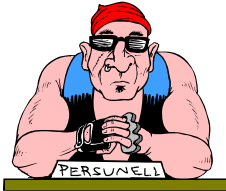
1-206-984-0021

CALL 24 HRS, 7 DAYS A WEEK, INCLUDING SUNDAYS & HOLIDAYS

Getting Info Can Be Difficult

Type of Information	% Asking	% Releasing
Employment dates	97	98
Eligible for re-hire	64	42
Salary history	66	41
Reason for leaving	94	19
Performance	86	18
Employability		16
Work habits		13
People skills		11

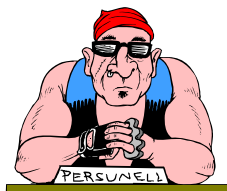
Finding New Information



Finding New Information About the Applicant

- **Types of Information**
 - personality
 - interpersonal style
 - background
 - work habits
- **Alternative Measures**
 - psychological tests
 - letters of recommendation
 - biodata
 - resumes
 - interviews
- **Problems**
 - references seldom agree
 - people act in different ways in different situations

Checking for Potential Discipline Problems



Checking for Potential Discipline Problems

- Criminal Records
- Previous employers
- Motor vehicle records
- Military records
- Credit reports
- Colleges and universities
- Neighbors and friends

Criminal Records

- Obtained from local and state agencies
- Check with each jurisdiction
- Only convictions can be used (EEOC Decision No. 72-1460)
 - “Reasonable amount of time” between release and decision to hire
 - In using convictions, employer must consider
 - Nature and gravity of offense
 - Amount of time that has passed since the conviction and/or completion of the sentence
 - The nature of the job held or being sought
 - Gousie and Aamodt (1993) Study

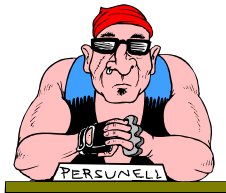
Type of Crime	Lawyers/HR Managers	State Supreme Court Justices
Violent Crime		
More severe/related to job	> 10 years	Never hire
Less severe, related to job	4-7 years	5 years
More severe, not related	2 years	5 years
Less severe, not related	No waiting	No waiting
Property Crime		
More severe/related to job	7-10 years	Never hire
Less severe, related to job	4-7 years	1 year
More severe, not related	No waiting	5 years
Less severe, not related	No waiting	No waiting
Moral Crime		
More severe/related to job	No waiting	Never hire
Less severe, related to job	No waiting	1 year
More severe, not related	No waiting	10 years
Less severe, not related	No waiting	No waiting

Credit Checks

- **Purpose**
 - Predict motivation to steal
 - Determine character of applicant
- **Fair Credit Reporting Act**
 - Order through a Consumer Reporting Agency (CRA)
 - Provide written notice to applicant to you will be checking credit
 - Get applicant's written authorization to check credit
 - If adverse action is to be taken
 - Provide applicant with "Pre-adverse Action Disclosure" which includes copy of credit report
 - Inform applicant that they will not be hired due to credit check and provide name of CRA and notice of applicant rights to appeal within 60 days



Predicting Performance



Scoring Issues

LoR Components

- Opening
 - Happy to write letter
 - Writer and applicant relationship
- Descriptions of applicant's traits/skills/character
- Descriptions of the letter writer's research team/class
- Description of applicant's activities
 - Resume
 - Applicant statement
 - Other application material
- Overall Evaluation
 - Quality of the student
 - Strength of recommendation
 - Prediction of future success
- Closing
 - Let me know if you have any questions

Scoring Letters of Recommendation

- Overall judgment of favorability
- Evaluation of applicant's traits/skills/character (trait method)
 - Mental agility (openness)
 - Vigor (energy and motivation)
 - Urbanity (extroversion)
 - Cooperation/Consideration (agreeableness)
 - Dependability/reliability (conscientiousness)
- Evaluation of components
 - Quality of the student
 - Strength of recommendation
 - Prediction of future success
- Presence of problems (pass/fail)

Trait Method of Evaluating Letters of Recommendation

- Peres and Garcia (1962)
- The Technique
 - Read each letter
 - Highlight traits in each letter
 - Place each trait into one of five categories
 - Mental agility (openness to experience)
 - Vigor
 - Urbanity (Extroversion)
 - Cooperation-Consideration (Agreeableness)
 - Dependability-Reliability (Conscientiousness)
 - Total the number of traits per category
 - Divide the number of traits per category by the total number of traits

Dear HR Director,

Ms. Rachel Green asked that I write this letter in support of her application as an assistant manager and I am pleased to do so. I have known Rachel for six years as she was my assistant in the accounting department.

Rachel is one of the most **popular** employees in our agency as she is a **kind, outgoing, sociable** individual. She has a great sense of **humor**, is **extroverted**, and is **very helpful**. In completing her work, she is **independent, energetic**, and **motivated**.

Mental Ability:0 **Urbanity: 5** **Vigor: 3**
Cooperation: 2 **Dependability: 0**

Dear HR Director,

Ms. Monica Geller asked that I write this letter in support of her application as an assistant manager and I am pleased to do so. I have known Monica for six years as she was my assistant in the accounting department.

Monica always had her work completed **accurately** and **promptly**. In her six years here, she **never missed a deadline**. She is very **detail oriented, critical**, and **methodical** in her problem solving approach. Interpersonally, Monica is very **caring** and **helpful**.

Mental Ability:0 **Urbanity: 0** **Vigor: 0**
Cooperation: 2 **Dependability: 6**

Elijah Craig

Dear Mr. Daniels:

It is a pleasure to write this letter in support of Mr. Elijah Craig. I have known Elijah for 10 years as he was an accounting associate in our firm.

Elijah is a very dependable, careful, and precise person. He amazes all of use at the office with his attention to detail and with the accuracy of his reports. To the best of my knowledge, Elijah always has his work completed on time. Elijah is a considerate employee who is a real team player.

James Beam

Dear Mr. Daniels:

It is a pleasure to write this letter in support of Mr. James Beam. I have known Jim for 10 years as he was an accounting associate in our firm.

Jim is one of the most intelligent, original, and creative individuals I have ever met. He is always developing new ideas. In addition to being so smart, Jim has a great sense of humor, is very friendly, and always cheerful.

Scoring Letters of Recommendation

- Overall judgment of favorability
- Evaluation of applicant's traits/skills/character (trait method)
 - Mental agility (openness)
 - Vigor (energy and motivation)
 - Urbanity (extroversion)
 - Cooperation/Consideration (agreeableness)
 - Dependability/reliability (conscientiousness)
- Evaluation of components
 - Quality of the student
 - Strength of recommendation
 - Prediction of future success
- Presence of problems (pass/fail)

Quality of the Student

10	Best student I ever had
9	One of my best students ever
8	The best student in the department
7	One of the best students in the department, Best in the class
6	One of the best students in the class
5	Received an A, exceptional/outstanding/superior student
4	Very good/solid/strong student
3	Above average/good student; Received a B in my class
2	Average/respectable/satisfactory student
1	Less than average student/has problems

Strength of Recommendation

6	My strongest/highest possible endorsement
5	Strongly/enthusiastically/highly/whole heartedly/unequivocally recommend
	Recommend without reservation/would accept into our program
4	Fully support the application
3	Recommend
2	Recommend with reservation
1	Do not recommend

Prediction of the Future

6	Will do extremely/very well
	Will make an impact/positive contribution/add value
	Will be an excellent/strong/outstanding student
5	Will be successful/do well
	Has the necessary skills to succeed in graduate school
4	Will complete the program
3	Applicant has potential/shows great promise
2	Unsure if applicant will be successful
1	Has doubts about the applicant's success

Scoring Letters of Recommendation

- Overall judgment of favorability
- Evaluation of applicant's traits/skills/character (trait method)
 - Mental agility (openness)
 - Vigor (energy and motivation)
 - Urbanity (extroversion)
 - Cooperation/Consideration (agreeableness)
 - Dependability/reliability (conscientiousness)
- Evaluation of components
 - Quality of the student
 - Strength of recommendation
 - Prediction of future success
- Presence of problems (pass/fail)

Validity

Validity: Graduate GPA

Predictor	N	r
G.R.E.	264	.23*
Junior/Senior G.P.A.	262	.38*
Trait Method		
Mental agility (openness)	223	.15*
Vigor	223	-.16*
Urbanity (extraversion)	223	.02
Cooperation/consideration	223	-.07
Dependability/reliability	223	.02
Overall evaluation of letter	173	.16*
Structured scoring	166	.19*

Checklist Validity: Graduate GPA

Predictor	N	r
Checklist Category		
Scholarship	213	.27*
Academic potential	213	.27*
Initiative	213	.22*
Oral communication	127	.14
Ability to work with others	123	.03
Dependability	213	.24*
Ability to write	122	.07
Average rating	213	.29*

LoR Validity: Teaching Ratings

Predictor	N	r
G.R.E.	146	- .01
Undergraduate G.P.A.	148	.00
Trait Method		
Mental agility (openness)	132	- .09
Vigor	132	- .03
Urbanity (extraversion)	132	.19*
Cooperation/consideration	132	.09
Dependability/reliability	132	- .18
Overall Impressions	58	.07
Structured Scoring	57	- .08

Checklist Validity: Teaching Ratings

Predictor	N	r
Checklist Category		
Scholarship	118	- .08
Academic potential	115	- .12
Initiative	117	- .06
Oral communication	33	- .06
Ability to work with others	33	- .05
Dependability	116	.06
Ability to write	33	- .06
Average rating	118	- .05

Validity: Meta-analysis

Criteria	K	N	r	95% Conf			90% Cred		SE%
				L	U	ρ	L	U	
Performance	30	7,419	.18	.15	.22	.29	.13	.44	41%
Tenure	3	2,131	.08	.04	.12				100%

Meta-analysis Comparison

Meta-analysis	K	N	r	ρ
Aamodt & Williams (2005)	30	7,419	.18	.29
Hunter & Hunter (1984)		5,389		.26
Reilly & Chao (1982)	8	3,696	.18	

Validity Comparison

Predictor	r	ρ	Meta-analysis
Structured interview	.34	.57	Huffcutt & Arthur (1994)
Work samples		.54	Schmidt & Hunter (1998)
Cognitive ability		.51	Schmidt & Hunter (1998)
Job knowledge		.48	Hunter & Hunter (1984)
Assessment center	.28	.38	Arthur et al. (2003)
Situational judgment tests	.26	.34	McDaniel et al. (2001)
Integrity tests	.21	.34	Ones et al. (1993)
References	.18	.29	Aamodt & Williams (2005)
Conscientiousness	.15	.24	Hurtz & Donovan (2000)
Unstructured interviews	.11	.20	Huffcutt & Arthur (1994)
Interest inventories		.10	Hunter & Hunter (1984)

Correlations Among Predictors

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. UG GPA		.10	.48*	.13	.45*	.50*
2. GRE			.09	.10	.00	.07
3. Reference checklist				.00	.51*	.44*
4. Mental agility traits					.10	-.02
5. Overall impressions						.61*
6. Structured scoring						

Predicting Future Performance

References Are Not Good Predictors

- Poor reliability
- Leniency
- Situations are different
- Limited opportunity to view behavior
- Extraneous factors



Reliability of Letters

Trait Category	N	Two Writers, One Applicant	Same Writer, Two Applicants
Mental agility (openness)	819	.18*	.48*
Vigor		.08*	.27*
Urbanity (extraversion)		.11*	.11
Cooperation/consideration		.04	.11
Dependability/reliability		.10*	.18
Overall impression		.23*	.32*
Structured scoring		.28*	
Lines		.21*	.58*

Reliability of Reference Checklist

Checklist Category	N	Two Writers, One Applicant	Same Writer, Two Applicants
Scholarship	810	.24*	.22*
Academic potential		.24*	.23*
Initiative		.15*	.30*
Oral communication		.22*	.13
Work well with others		.11*	.46*
Dependability		.14*	.34*
Writing ability		.16*	.21
Average rating		.24*	.35*

LoR Reliability: Meta-analysis

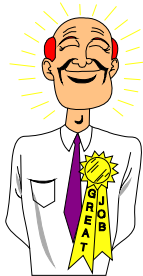
	K	N	r	SE%
Writer				
Favorability	5	1,841	.22*	100
Length	2	1,351	.16*	30%
Reader				
Favorability	4	405	.68	21%

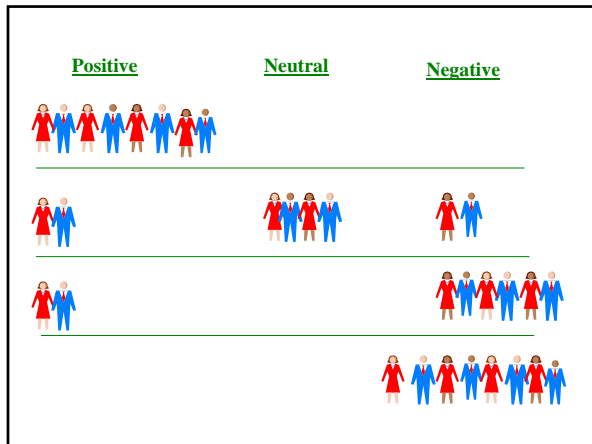
Leniency of References

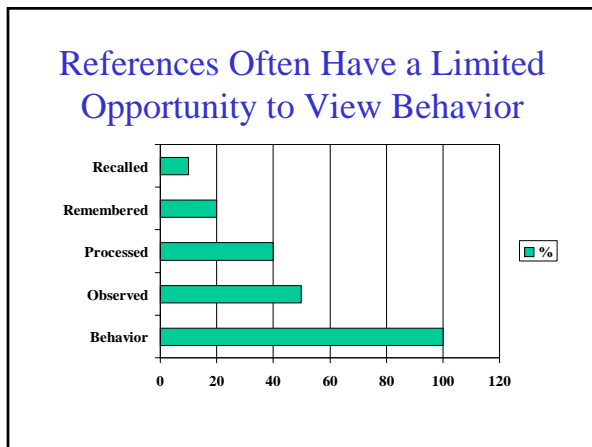
- Our applicants are from Lake Wobegon
 - Excellent (60.27%)
 - Above average (35.94%)
 - Average (3.56%)
 - Below average (0.23% - only 16 out of 6,854 ratings!)
- Mosel and Goheen (1958)
 - 0.5% of ratings were poor
 - 6.4% were average
- Zeleznik (1983)
 - 74% very highly/highly recommended
 - 25% recommended
 - 1% recommended with reservation

Leniency

- Applicants often choose their own references
- Applicants often have the right to see their files
- Former employers fear legal ramifications

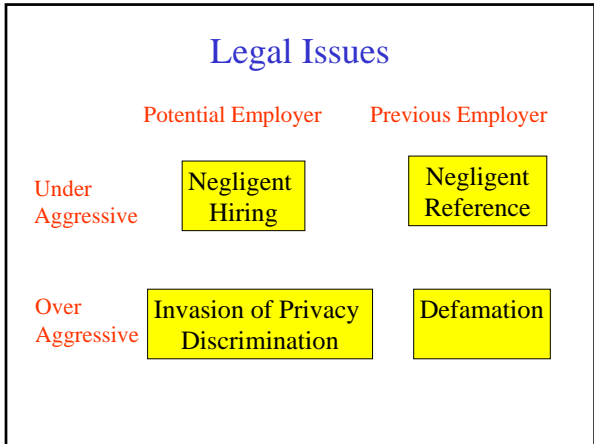






Potential Legal Ramifications

- Negligent hiring
- Invasion of privacy
- Negligent reference
- Defamation



Defamation

- Three types
 - libel (written)
 - slander (oral)
 - self-publication
- Employers have a conditional privilege that limits their liability

Avoiding Liability for Defamation

Employers will not be liable if their statements were

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truthful <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – statements were true – not true, but reasonable person would have believed them to be true – opinions are protected unless reference infers opinion is based on facts that don't exist • Made for a legitimate purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made in good faith <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – don't offer unsolicited information – statements cannot be made for revenge – avoid personal comments • Made with the permission of the applicant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – use waivers – let the former employee know if the reference will not be positive
---	---

Providing Honest References

- Advantages
 - Motivates current employees to do well
 - Makes positive references meaningful
 - Limits negligent reference liability
 - Demonstrates awareness of a social duty to be a good organization
- Disadvantages
 - Increases the chance of a defamation suit
 - May make it harder to attract qualified applicants

Extraneous Factors Surrounding the Reference

- Reference giver's ability to articulate
- The extent to which the referee remembers the applicant
- The words used by the reference giver
 - *cuter than a baby's butt*
 - *she has no sexual oddities that I am aware of*
 - *I have an intimate and caring relationship with the applicant*
 - *Jill is a bud that has already begun to bloom*

The Story Behind The Study

- Strange phrases in letters of recommendation
- The rude roommate
- The grammatically challenged boss



Method

- 217 students listened to one of 6 tapes of a reference check
- Job Status
 - architect
 - construction worker
- Speech Errors (0, 2, 6)



Effect of Speech Errors on Applicant Ratings

- 0 errors 3.91^a
- 2 errors 3.69^{ab}
- 6 errors 3.39^b



The Real Meaning of Recommendations

Recommendation	Actual Meaning
He is a man of great vision	He hallucinates
He is definitely a man to watch	I don't trust him
She merits a close look	Don't let her out of your sight
He's the kind of employee you can swear by	He likes dirty jokes
She doesn't mind being disturbed	She spent 10 years in a mental hospital
When he worked for us, he was given many citations	He was arrested several times
She gives every appearance of being a loyal, dedicated employee	But, appearances are deceiving

The Real Meaning of Recommendations

Recommendation	Actual Meaning
If I were you I would give him sweeping responsibilities	He can handle a broom
She commands the respect of everyone with whom she works	But she rarely gets it
I am sure that whatever task he undertakes, no matter how small, he will be fired with enthusiasm	He will foul up any project
You would be very lucky to get this person to work for you	She is lazy
You will never catch him asleep on the job	He is too crafty to get caught

Adverse Impact

Correlations with Sex and Race

	N	Sex		Race
		Writer	Student	Student
Trait Category				
Mental agility (openness)	1,065	-.09*	-.08	-.04
Vigor	427	-.03	.05	.06
Urbanity (extraversion)		.06	.05	.05
Cooperation/consideration		.08*	-.04	.05
Dependability/reliability		.03	.05	-.13*
Structured scoring		-.07	.09	-.02
Overall Impression		-.06	.03	-.11
Lines		.01	.06	.06

Sex (1=m, 2 =f), Race (0=white, 1=minority)

Correlations with Sex and Race

Checklist Category	Sex		Race
	Writer	Student	Student
N	1,013	368	368
Scholarship	.00	.10*	-.19*
Academic potential	-.01	.04	-.10*
Initiative	-.04	.03	.01
Oral communication	.04	.07	-.03
Ability to work with others	-.01	.01	.00
Dependability	-.06	.06	-.09
Ability to write	.01	.09	-.21*
Average rating	-.01	.08	-.11*

Group Comparison

	Sex	Race	Meta-analysis
Cognitive ability		1.10	Roth et al. (2001)
GPA		.78	Roth & Bobko (2000)
Biodata		.33	Bobko et al. (1999)
Structured interview		.23	Huffcutt & Roth (1998)
Personality		.09	Schmitt et al. (1999)
References	-.01	.08	Aamodt & Williams (2005)
Integrity tests		.07	Ones & Viswesvaran (1998)

Sex is Men-Women Race is White-Black

Form of Reference

	Form of Reference	
	Informal	Formal
Applicant Sex		
Men	86.7%	13.3%
Women	83.5%	16.5%
Writer Sex		
Men	85.5%	14.5%
Women	83.1%	16.9%

None of the main effects are significant, nor are the interactions

Conclusions

- References and LORs
 - Have low interrater reliability and LORs may say more about the writer than the applicant
 - Can be reliably scored if a structured system is used
 - Are valid ($r = .18$) but don't seem to add incremental validity
 - Structured methods that are job related may be best
 - Seem not to be influenced by the sex or race of the writer or the applicant
 - Low probability of adverse impact
- Further Research Areas
 - Need more info on sex and race differences
 - Need more studies using content valid methods for specific jobs
- Letter Length Trivia
 - Average was 26 lines
 - Shortest was 3 lines
 - Longest was 132 lines

Ethical Issues

Causes of Unethical Dilemmas

- Relationship to party
- Inexperience
- Lack of training
- No guidelines
- Guided by own values and personal preferences (Badaraco, J. & Webb, A., 1995)

Ethical Dilemmas in References

Professional

1. Not being allowed to give a reference (even a positive one) on a former employee (can only confirm they were employed)
2. Being allowed to only give the same neutral references, regardless of whether person was a good or poor performer
3. Giving a reference on a poor employee (is there a duty to disclose both negative and positive?)
4. Giving a reference on a friend/family member who may not be right for the job
5. Giving a reference on someone who is a good worker/student but is disliked by me and others
6. Giving a reference on someone whose lifestyle conflicts with the reference-provider values
7. Using unsolicited references from neighbors/friends that are negative but not job-related.

Academic

- Giving a reference on a below average student
- Providing unauthorized disclosures of a student's personal circumstances (illnesses, disability)
- Determining if there is an obligation to give references on all my students, if I do it for one
- When contacted by employers for a list of best students, determining if I should let all eligible students know or just use my own judgment and submit names I think are best
- Refusing to give a reference on a good student because of bad relationships between writer and student

Individual Guidelines for Ethical References

- Always refer to your company or school policy
- State the relationship between the writer and the applicant (professor-teacher; supervisor-employee; coworker; family member)
- Be honest with the applicant about the degree to which the reference will be positive
- Meet deadlines for writing and submitting references
- Appropriately use job titles and official letterhead
- Avoid conflicts of interest when asked to provide a recommendation for two or more people applying for the same position
- Decline to provide references for people the writer feels negatively towards
- Maintain confidentiality
- Refrain from asking personal questions about the applicant that are irrelevant to the position
- Acknowledge the impact the relationship between the reference seeker and the applicant (good or bad) may have on the reference seeker.

- When contacted by prospective employers for a list of “good students,” post/email the position for all qualified students to see.
- Don’t share any information without getting an authorization from a student/applicant.
- After writing a reference letter, allow the student/applicant to see it, and to decide whether or not they want the letter to be passed on.
- Provide only job-related information.
- Do not camouflage information on a substandard employee.
- Do not talk about facts “off the record.”
- Have requests for references made in writing.

- Organizational Guidelines for Ensuring Ethical References**
- Get legislation passed that sets guidelines (or)
 - Organizations should voluntarily adopt a reasonable disclosure policy
 - Limit the number of people who are allowed to provide references
 - Ensure that reference givers are well trained in the laws and ethics of references
 - Limit references to documented job-related information
 - Obtain consent forms

Practical Issues

Suggestions for the Applicant

- Ensure you have references
 - Current
 - Contact info for former
- Choose references to provide information from multiple perspectives
- Provide information to the reference provider
 - Resume
 - Deadlines
 - Other important information
 - Stamped/addressed envelopes
- Follow-up to make sure they have been written and sent
- Waiving the right to see the letter
 - References are more positive
 - But, will you irritate the reference provider

Suggestions for the Reference

- Be Honest
 - Reputation at stake
 - Moral obligation?
- Allow Applicant to Read Letter and Decide to Use
 - Puts Applicant in Control
 - Should Protect Against Defamation Focus on Behaviors and Outcomes
- Use Plenty of Examples
 - Viewed more positively
 - Unique to individual
- Write Relatively Long Letters
 - Viewed more positively than short letters
 - Remember that it's not about you

Suggestions for the Reader

- Use care in making inferences
 - Strange phrases
 - *He is cuter than a baby's butt*
 - *She has no sexual oddities that I am aware of*
 - Missing information
 - Annoying comments
 - *I/O has long been dominated by white males and accepting Karen will give you an opportunity to rectify that*
 - *You previously accepted two of our mediocre students so I see no reason why you wouldn't accept Fred*
