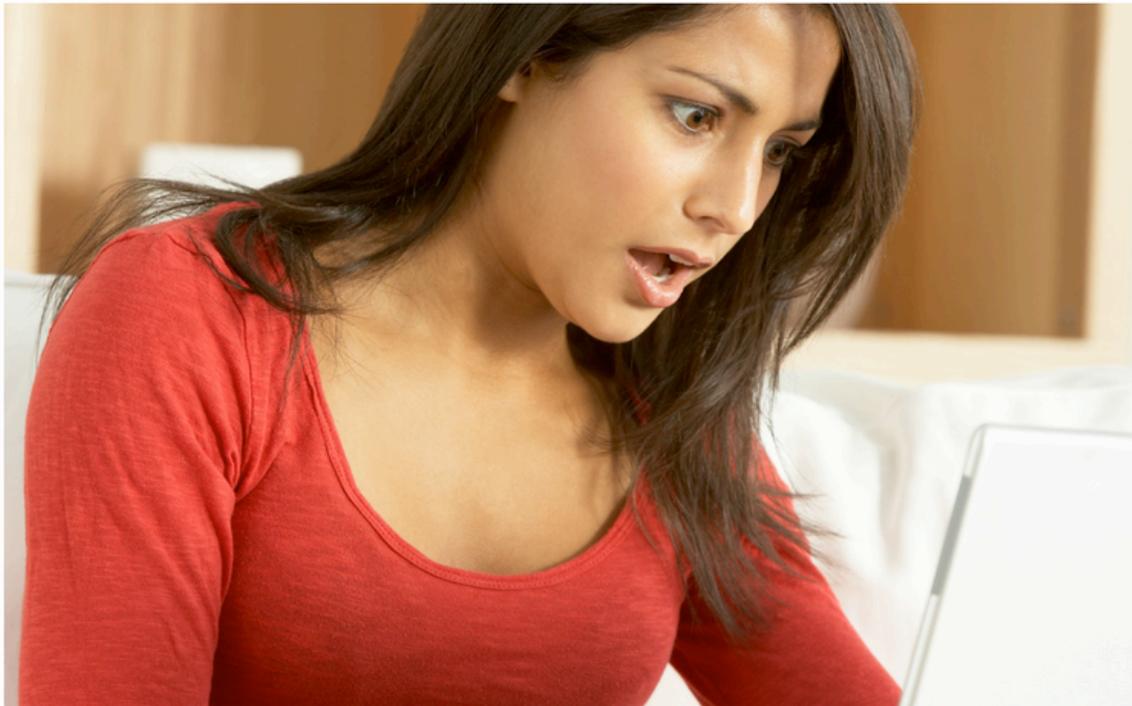


# THEY SAID **WHAT** ABOUT ME?

*When to hire a professional reference checking service*



## WHAT YOU'LL DISCOVER

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**How references can impact your job search**

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**How reference checking companies work and when to hire one.**

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**What you can do if you get a bad reference**

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## **Are your references sabotaging your job search?**

BY WRITE STEP RESUMES, LLC

There are three possible outcomes with a reference check. The reference may provide no additional information to influence your employment prospects, or he or she may either help or harm your chances. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider who you provide as a reference to a prospective employer, assuming you are given the opportunity to submit names for the reference check.....

## **When to Hire a Reference Checking Service**

At some point during the interview process, a hiring representative may request professional references. The employer will ask about your relationship to the reference, how long you worked together, and whether they'd hire you again. This isn't your first rodeo, so you have your list of names, numbers, and email addresses locked and loaded. In your quest to beat the system, you inadvertently forgot to check in with your contacts to ensure they knew what lie to tell about how you never missed a day, delivered top-notch results, and supervised an entire department.

To avoid this disaster in your job search, always check in with your references and provide them with an updated copy of your resume. An employer's call should never catch your references off guard. Refresh their memories about the work you did together so they can speak intelligently about the value you offer. This goes without saying, but don't lie. Don't put your references in a position to exaggerate your experience, only to have them flake when asked to elaborate.

Many companies have an HR policy to only release information regarding your dates of employment and position. Don't rely solely on this, because this won't stop a disgruntled or bitter employer from spilling the beans about your entire work history.

Do you know what your references will say about you? Even if you think your reference will speak of you positively, wouldn't be nice to know for sure?

To find out exactly what an employer will reveal about you, you could consider hiring a professional reference checking company.

### **How Does It Work?**

You provide the reference checking company with the contact information of one or more possible references, arrange payment (ranging from \$30 to \$100 per reference), and they will make contact.

You may have to submit a written authorization form for the release of information for the company to keep on file, as some employers require it before providing information for a reference check.

It can take anywhere from one day to several weeks to receive your report(s), depending on how difficult — or easy — it is to track down the contacts. Most professional reference checking companies will attempt between 4-6 contacts, leaving messages each time requesting a return phone call to check a reference.

The reference checker represents himself or herself as a reference checking service on behalf of an unnamed prospective employer, so the person who is being questioned as a reference won't know you hired a service.

Common questions that are asked by the reference checking service include:

- Verification that you worked for the company
- Your job title and role with the company
- Employment beginning and end dates
- Pay rate
- Evaluation of key performance attributes
- Reason for separation/leaving the company
- Eligibility for re-hire by the company
- Recommendation for hire by the prospective employer

Higher-level packages also often include:

- Additional performance attributes
- Collecting information about accomplishments
- Evaluation of leadership/problem-solving capabilities

Most services will provide verbatim quotes from the reference as part of the written report.

### **Possible Reference checking Services**

Here are three companies that offer reference checking services to jobseekers.

- CheckMyReference.com

Basic (\$29.90); Professional (\$44.90); Executive (\$69)

No charge for rush service

- CheckYourReference.com

Standard (\$34.50); Professional (\$48.50); Teacher (\$58.50); Executive (\$69.50)

Includes a written report with direct quotes from the conversation

Cease-and-desist letter: \$75

Certified report and sworn affidavit: \$65 (an alternative to in-person testimony if pursuing legal action against a bad reference)

- MyReferences.com (a service of Allison & Taylor)

Professionals (\$79); Teachers (\$79); Executives (\$99)

Includes a written report with direct quotes

Cease-and-desist letter: \$395

Background check (financial and criminal records check): \$99

Rush service available for an additional fee

The report will name the individual who provided the reference. This may be different than the contact name you provided — if the reference checker was directed to the HR department, for example.

Some of these companies also perform professional reference checking services for employers, including pre-employment screening services (background checks as well as reference checks).

*Note:* The fees you pay to a professional reference checking company may be tax-deductible as job search expenses. Consult with your tax advisor for details.

### **Things To Consider When Hiring a Reference Checking Company:**

- *Review the company's cancellation/substitution policies carefully.* If the reference you provide does not return phone calls and cannot be contacted, you probably won't receive a refund. There are many reasons why a reference may not be able to be contacted, including illness, vacations, or business travel. Or he or she may simply not want to provide a reference and, consequently, be unavailable for contact. (In these cases, the reference checking service will let you know that they were unable to obtain a reference; this is likely the same result a prospective employer would receive, so even that information can be useful. If a reference advises you to use his or her name, and then won't make himself or herself available to speak to a prospective employer, that's important information to know. You'll find out if a reference will cooperate!)
- *Ask the company about callbacks.* If the service you choose does not provide employment verification services for corporate clients, make sure the callback number they are using does not appear in Google search results as a third-party reference checking service; otherwise, the reference may discover you're investigating him or her, leading to future negative references, even if he or she would have provided a positive one previously.
- *Check the company's confidentiality policy.* If challenged by the reference about "who is asking," most reference checking companies will represent themselves as an independent third-party verification service conducting a reference check. In general, the companies won't misrepresent themselves as an actual prospective employer if they are asked, because that is against the law in some states.

### **What Can You Do If You Get a Bad Reference?**

If you've been involved in a lawsuit in your previous job, this may affect your future employment, depending on what your former employer says about you. Even if you left on good terms, you may find you're getting a less-than-stellar reference. So what should you do if you find your references are hurting your employment prospects?

It depends on the type of negative information that is uncovered. Common issues include:

- Inaccurate information
- Badmouthing
- Discrimination

Inaccurate information is the easiest to correct. If you're being badmouthed, you may have to get legal advice for how to handle it. Some reference checking companies will offer services to help you address bad references. For example, CheckYourReference.com can prepare a cease-and-desist letter for you to send to an offending reference for \$75.

While it's not always possible to keep a prospective employer from talking to a bad reference, if you can, send prospective employers to a different reference who can also speak to your experience at that company, but with a more positive attitude.

### **What's Next in Reference Checking?**

Some jobseekers are using professional reference checks to their advantage in the job search, presenting pre-checked references as part of the interview process — like a “CarFax” for candidates. Presenting a written report of your references, validated by a third-party service, can reassure a prospective employer. This is even more powerful when the references are checked again, and the same information is discovered in the company's own reference check.

If you find you're getting interviews, but not job offers, your references might be the problem. A third-party reference checking service can help you identify whether this is the case, and give you the information you need to decide how to proceed. If your references are providing glowing testimonials of your employment, knowing that can also boost your confidence, and potentially give you a tool that you can use to strengthen your candidacy.