

How To Serve as A Reference

As a supervisor of student employees, the likelihood of you being asked to serve as a reference is very high. Students will often seek your assistance when they are transitioning to the workforce.

Accepting the Request

When a student employee asks you to serve as a reference, think about how well you know them and their working style. If the student has been working in your department continuously and always produces quality work, you should support the student employee and agree to be a reference.

Declining the Request

If you are unsure about your ability to serve as a reference for this student, politely decline the request. Be honest – it is better to let the student employee know you're not comfortable than give his or her prospective employer a less than strong reference.

Here are some ways to politely decline a reference request:

"I don't think I am familiar enough with your working style to be a strong reference."

"I'm am unaware of the skills that qualify you for this type of job. I think finding someone else would be more beneficial to you."

Being A Strong Reference

Think about what made this student employee good at his/her job. Why did you enjoy working with this student employee? Why did they stand out as a worker?

It may be smart to ask the student for a job description or information about their career goals. This will help focus your answers on what the employer and the student specifically want.

A strong reference will provide specific examples of when the student employee excelled. For example, instead of saying "Karen was a good leader," you can elaborate by explaining "Karen took initiative on an office presentation with little supervision."