Reference check call script

30 questions, an opening and a close. Ask every reference for a role the same core questions.

Candidate

Role

Reference's name and job title

How they worked together

Date and time of the call

Called by

Before you call

- The candidate agreed to this reference check and gave you this person's details.
- Pick the questions for this role before the first call, and ask every reference the same core ones.
- Tell the reference how long it will take (about 15 minutes).
- Take notes as you go. Write what they said, not your reading of it.

Opening

“Hi [name], this is [your name] from [company]. [Candidate] has applied for a [role] job with us and gave us your name as a reference. Do you have about 15 minutes now, or is there a better time? ... I'll ask about the work you saw them do. Is it OK if I take notes?”

Confirm the basics

#	Question	Notes
1	How do you know [candidate], and how long did you work together?	
2	What was their job, and what were they responsible for?	
3	Did you manage them directly? If not, how often did you see their work?	
4	Can you confirm their job title and the dates they worked there?	
5	Do you know why they moved on?	

How they do the work

#	Question	Notes
6	What were they best at?	
7	Tell me about a piece of work they were proud of. What was their part in it?	
8	How would you describe the quality of their work?	
9	How did they handle deadlines and busy weeks?	
10	Tell me about a time they made a mistake. What did they do next?	
11	How much direction did they need to do their best work?	
12	What would you have liked them to do more of?	

Working with others

#	Question	Notes
13	How did they get on with the rest of the team?	
14	Tell me about a disagreement they had at work. How did they handle it?	
15	How did they take feedback?	
16	How did they deal with customers, clients or other teams?	
17	If they managed people: how did their team feel about working for them?	
18	What kind of people did they work best with?	

Fit for this role

#	Question	Notes
19	This job involves [two or three main duties]. How well do you think they would do?	
20	What kind of manager gets the best out of them?	
21	What kind of workplace suits them best?	
22	Where do they still have room to grow?	
23	How did they grow while you worked together?	
24	If you were their new manager, what would you want to know on day one?	

Rehire and close

#	Question	Notes
25	Would you hire them or work with them again? Why?	
26	On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate their work overall? What would make it a 10?	
27	Is there anything that would stop you recommending them for this job?	
28	Is there anything I haven't asked that you think I should know?	
29	Is there someone else who worked closely with them I could talk to? (Only call them if the candidate agrees.)	
30	Can I get back to you if I have a follow-up question?	

Ratings

Use the same scale as the reference form and the scorecard sheet. Tick one box per row.

Area	Below expectations	Meets expectations	Above expectations	Outstanding
Reliability				
Teamwork				
Communication				
Quality of work				

Would they hire or work with them again? Yes / With reservations / No

Questions to leave out

Anything about age, health, disability or sick days, pregnancy or family plans, religion, race, national origin or marital status.

Salary history: several states and cities bar employers from asking for it, including through an agent.

Their life outside work.

Ask about the work, not the person's private life.

Closing

“Thank you, [name]. That was really useful. We are talking to a few more people, and [candidate] will hear from us about next steps. Thanks again for your time.”

Check your local law (this is not legal advice)

• California Labor Code 432.3 generally bars employers from seeking an applicant's salary history, “orally or in writing, personally or through an agent”. California Labor Commissioner's FAQ: https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/California_Equal_Pay_Act.htm

• US: if a background screening company interviews references for you, the Fair Credit Reporting Act may treat that as an investigative consumer report, which comes with written notice rules: 15 U.S.C. 1681d, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/15/1681d

• US: some states protect employers who answer reference requests unless what they share is knowingly false, for example Florida Statutes 768.095: https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2025/768.095

• Britain: Acas says a reference “must be accurate and fair”: https://www.acas.org.uk/providing-a-job-reference/what-employers-can-say-in-a-reference

• Rules differ by country, state and city. Check what applies to you, or ask a qualified adviser.