# Reference check call script

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

**Candidate**

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**Role**

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**Reference's name and job title**

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**How they worked together**

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**Date and time of the call**

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**Called by**

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## 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.