



How to get a great reference



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Some scholarship applications require at least one reference. The reference is an important part of the application and students should be strategic when deciding who they will ask to be their referee (a referee is a person who provides a reference).

When the scholarship committee is considering two equally good applications, it may be the reference(s) that determines who wins the award.

In this section of the Library we'll learn the following:

1. Who to ask for a reference
2. The different types of referees
3. How and when to ask for a reference
4. What to provide your referees
5. Email script for reference requests
6. How to follow up





Who to ask for a reference

A referee should be someone who knows you well and can speak with knowledge about your character, activities, and experiences. A referee cannot be a family member or a friend.



Your referee should have known you for a year or more, and relatively recently (for example, within the last two years). They should have, or have had, regular contact with you in some capacity so they can comment on your role in the activity and discuss your character and qualities, such as your integrity, work ethic, leadership skills, and so on.

Ideally, they should be able to give specific examples of when you have demonstrated the kinds of skills and qualities the scholarship is looking for. The more specific the person can be when providing your reference, the better.

It is also preferable—and sometimes required—for the referee to put their reference on letterhead from their place of work/business/organization.



Tip:

Do a social media audit and clean up anything questionable on all your accounts.

If you use social media ensure your profile is free of any kinds of posts or pictures that could negatively affect your ability to get a favourable reference. Some referees (and scholarship judges) might check the social media profiles of scholarship applicants.

Remember, when you ask someone to be a referee, you're asking them to vouch for you — for your character and your abilities. They're putting their reputation on the line to help you reach your goal, so be respectful of that.



Academic references

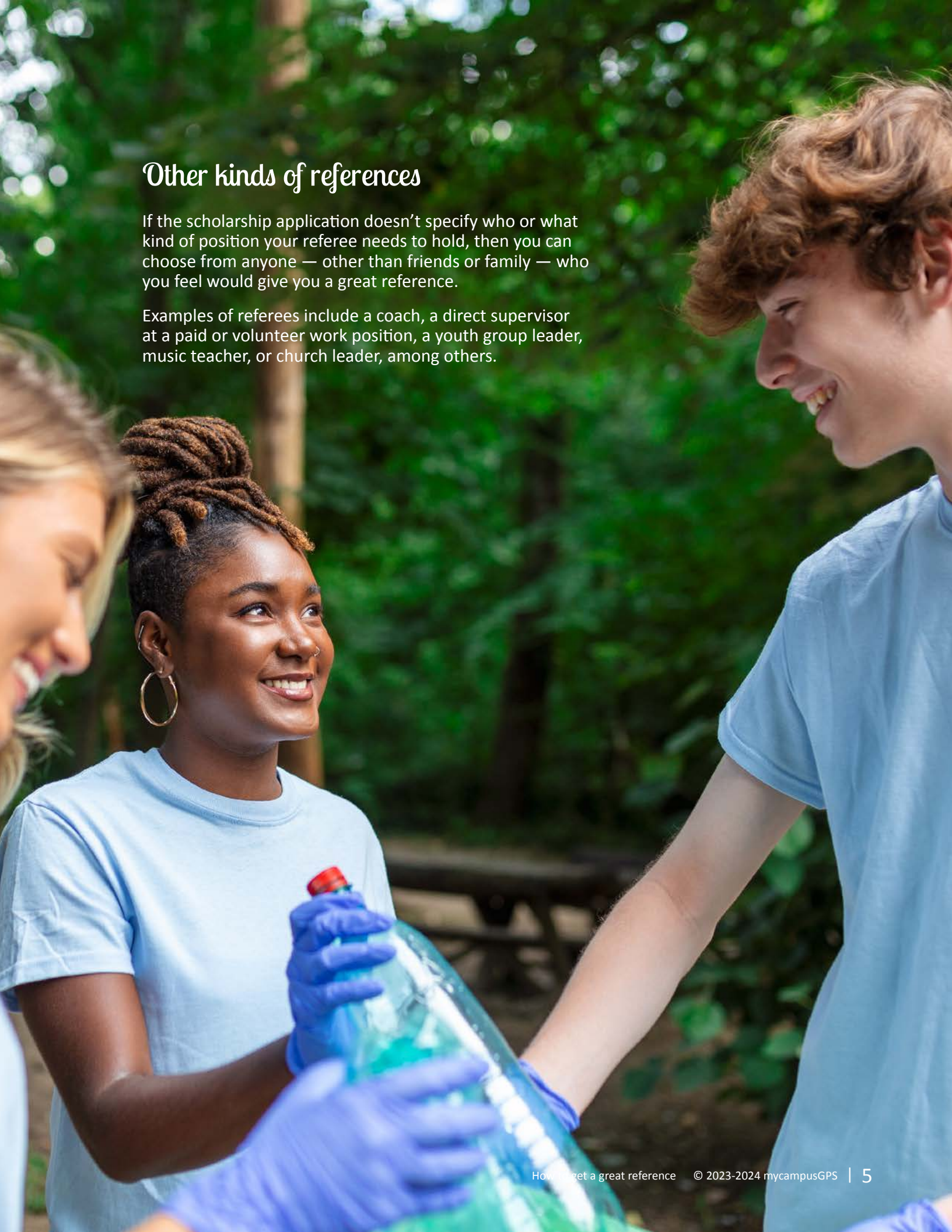
Sometimes the application will specify what kind of person is required to give the reference. For example, if it requires an academic reference, that usually means a teacher, or perhaps a guidance counsellor or a principal. It's best to ask someone with whom you've had some recent experience. So, for example, opt for a grade 11 teacher rather than a grade 9 one.

It can also help to align your referee with the type of scholarship you're applying for. For example, if it's a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) scholarship, ask a science or math teacher.

If it's a leadership scholarship, ask a teacher from a leadership-related class, e.g., Leadership 12, or a teacher who has seen you take on a leadership role in class, e.g., when you were a group leader or spokesperson.

It could also be beneficial if the teacher knows you from a club or sport as well. For example, if you're applying for a science-related scholarship, try to get a science teacher who is also your school's robotics team supervisor.

Or, if you're going into an arts-related program with an eye to eventually apply to law school, try to get your English teacher who is also your school's debate club supervisor. The referee can then speak with more authority on your character and experience and provide more specific details on them.

A photograph of three young people, two women and one man, wearing light blue t-shirts and purple nitrile gloves. They are outdoors in a wooded area, smiling and working together to hold a large, clear plastic bottle. The woman in the center has her hair in braids and is looking up at the bottle. The man on the right is looking down at the bottle. The woman on the left is partially visible, also smiling.

Other kinds of references

If the scholarship application doesn't specify who or what kind of position your referee needs to hold, then you can choose from anyone — other than friends or family — who you feel would give you a great reference.

Examples of referees include a coach, a direct supervisor at a paid or volunteer work position, a youth group leader, music teacher, or church leader, among others.

How and when to ask for a reference

It is your responsibility to ensure your referee has everything they need to give you a great reference. Many people are busy and it's likely your referee is a busy person with many responsibilities. It's up to the student requesting the reference to give the referee all the information they need and to provide it to them in a timely manner so they're able to do their best for you.



How far in advance should you request a reference?
Three or four weeks is usually a good amount of time.

You should always have a backup referee, just in case. Most people you ask will agree to give you the reference, but sometimes a person is unable to do so. In this case, you'll need to ask a second person.

Many people like to help young people reach their goals, so try not to be intimidated by asking someone to be a reference for you. Sometimes it's even considered part of their job to provide students with a reference.

As the applicant, it's your job to provide everything your referee needs to give you a great reference.



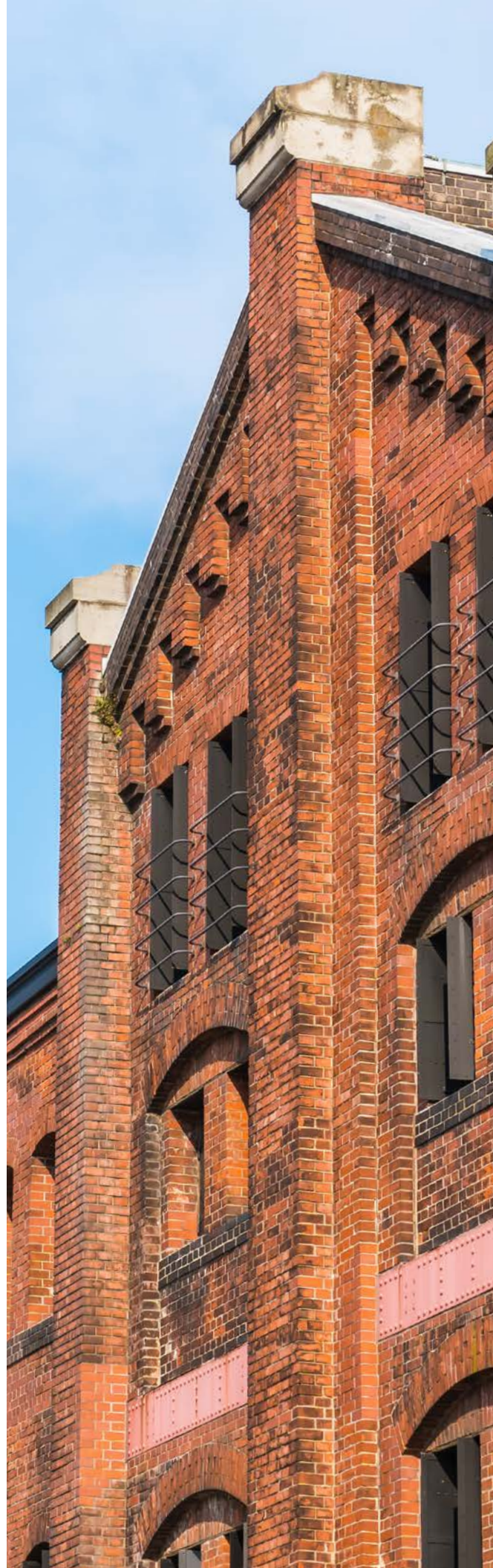
Materials to provide to your referee

Although it's not guaranteed, it's highly likely the person you ask to be your reference will say yes. So, when you ask, be prepared to give them the items they will need to provide the reference. Here are the items you should give to your referee:

- A copy of the scholarship application, or a link to it online. Indicate where they can find the reference instructions and tell them the process and deadline to submit the reference.
- A copy of your resumé and/or activities list.
- Any other information you feel would be helpful for them to get a better overall picture of your skills and experience. However, don't send them everything under the sun; only provide information that is specific to this purpose.
- You may wish to prompt your referee to highlight a particular skill, personal quality, or experience, especially if the scholarship focuses on a particular area. For example, if the scholarship is for leadership, remind your referee of a time you used your communication skills to motivate the team to keep working, even after it was evident your team was not going to win the game. See example in the "Email script to request a scholarship reference" below.
- Ask your referee to put the name of the scholarship in their reference letter.

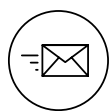


On page 8 you will find an email script to help guide your requests for scholarship references.



Email script for requesting a scholarship reference

1. Address them professionally.
2. Explain why you're contacting them.
3. Describe **the most important** criteria of the scholarship so the referee knows what to address in their letter.
4. Point out one or two of the best ways you have demonstrated the criteria of the award.
5. Attach or link the application. Point out the referee instructions and give them a submission deadline.
6. Attach your resumé or activities list so they get an overall picture of your activities and experiences.
7. Give your phone number for contact as well as email.
8. Thank them and ask them to get back to you by a certain time so you have time to ask another person if they decline.
9. Provide your email address and phone number below your name (this is normally where people look for this information).



An example

Dear Coach Wilson,

I am applying for the TD Leadership Scholarship and I'm writing to ask you to provide a reference for it.

This scholarship is for students who have helped make their community more inclusive and who have used innovation and initiative to make their community a better place for others.

As you know, for the past two years, I've taken on some leadership positions on the dance team and I'm hoping you can tell the scholarship committee about how I organized the team to put on the "Dance-Ability" workshop and performance for students with disabilities.

I have attached a copy of the application. The information for referees is highlighted on page 2. The deadline to submit the reference by mail to the organization is April 1.

I have also attached a copy of my resumé so you are aware of the other activities I participate in.

If you have any questions, please contact me by email or by phone at 902-123-4567.

I truly appreciate you taking the time to consider my request. Please let me know if you can provide the reference by March 5 so I have time to ask someone else if you are unable to assist me.

Sincerely,

Charlene Johnson

Charlene.Johnson18@gmail.com
902-123-4567

Follow-up with your referee

Make sure to follow-up with a short thank you message if they agree to provide a reference. Tell them you'll send a reminder to them about three days before the deadline. Put this date in your calendar and send the reminder on that date. Many referees need (and appreciate) a reminder.

Let them know you will inform them of the result if you're chosen for the scholarship. Referees love to get this news; let them share in your success!