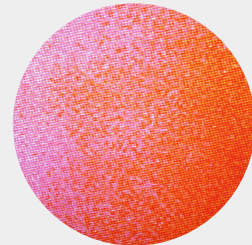
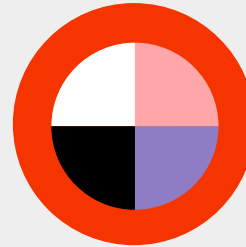
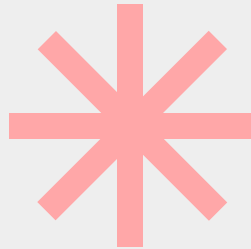
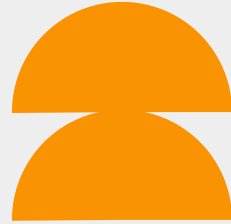
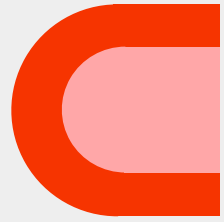
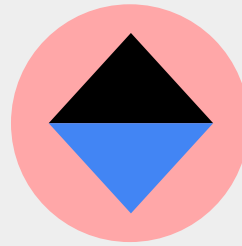
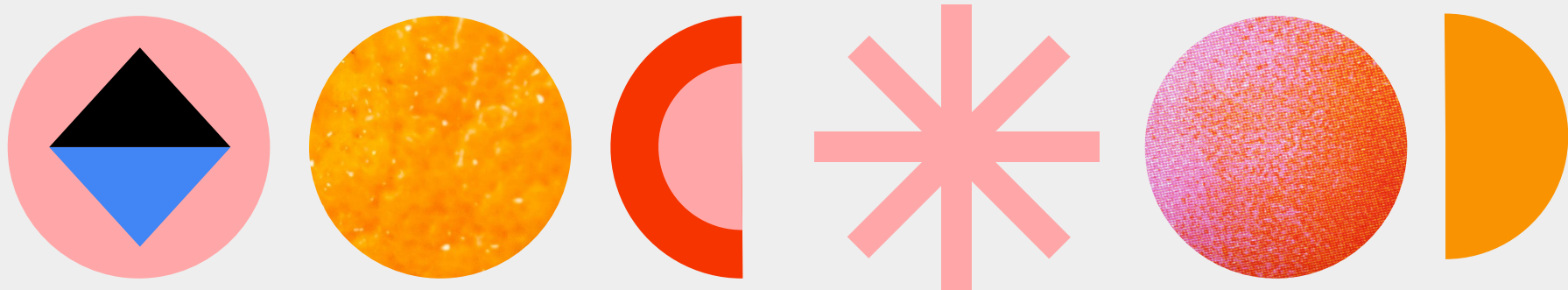


REFERENCES FOR YOUR REFERENCE CHECKS

DALE FISHER

*...with just a smattering
of info on Letters of
Recommendation*





DALE'S PSA #1

"DO THE CHECK OR BRACE FOR THE WRECK"

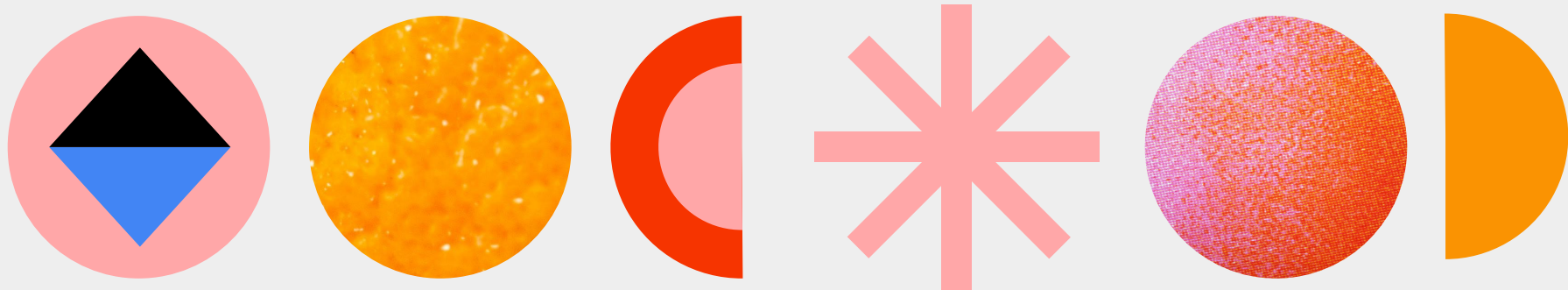




DO THEM...NOW!

Reference checks are a critical step in hiring, ensuring candidates have the skills, experience, and integrity **they claim**. A strong process helps uncover red flags, verify past performance, and assess cultural fit. Regularly reviewing and refining reference check procedures strengthens hiring decisions, **reduces risk**, and enhances workforce quality.





DALE'S PSA #2

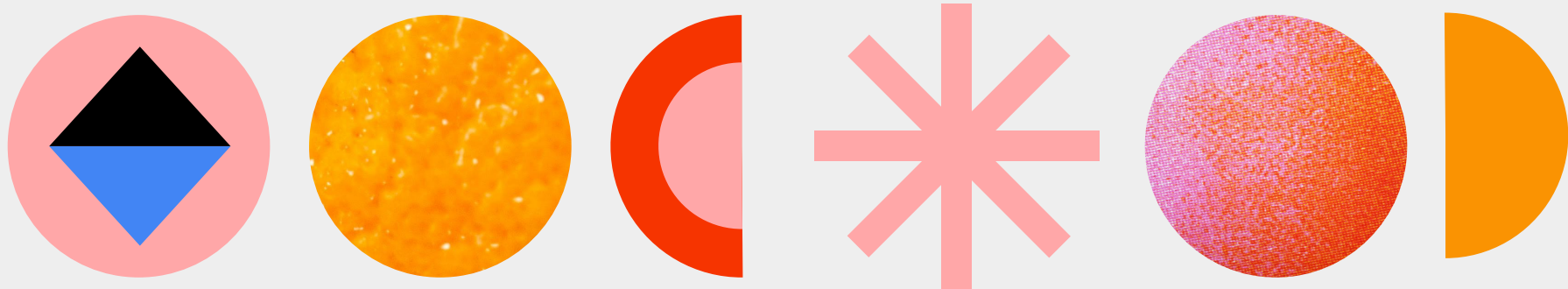
"HUMAN BEINGS LIE...PLAN ACCORDINGLY"





The ability to lie is deeply rooted in human evolution, psychology, and social dynamics. While lying is often seen as unethical, it serves various functions that have contributed to human survival and societal development.





DALE'S PSA #3

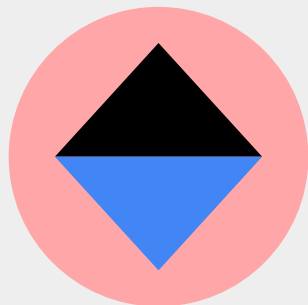
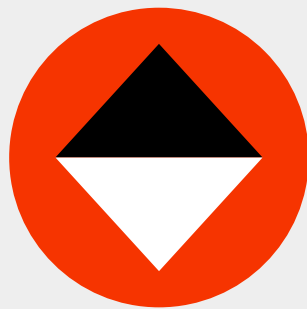
"YOUR NETWORK CAN SAVE YOUR NET-WORTH"



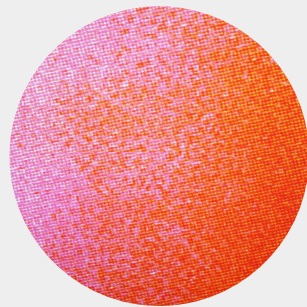
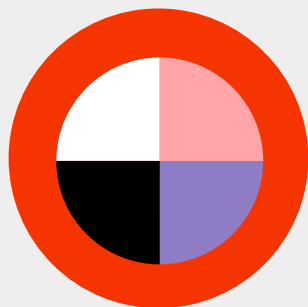


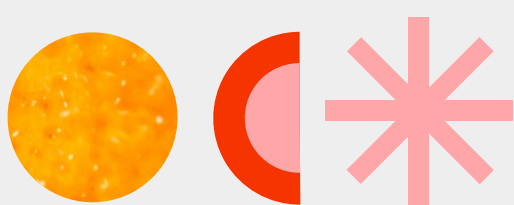
Networking matters...especially to tap into it for reference checks!
The best hires aren't just found on paper, they're confirmed by people who **know** the real story."





IMPORTANCE





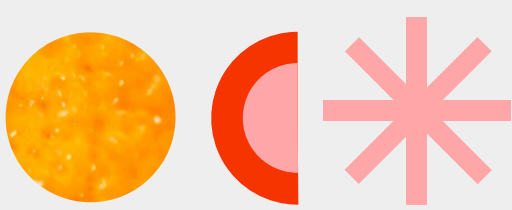
IMPORTANCE OF REFERENCE CHECKS

VALIDATION OF CANDIDATE CLAIMS

Reference checks can help verify the information a candidate has provided on their resume or during the interview process, such as job titles, dates of employment, and key responsibilities.

INSIGHT INTO SOFT SKILLS

They give you a sense of the candidate's interpersonal skills, work ethic, and how they handle challenges or conflicts.



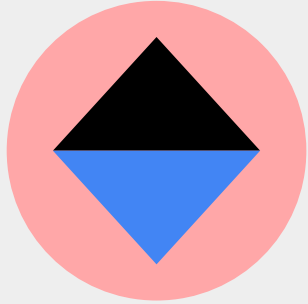
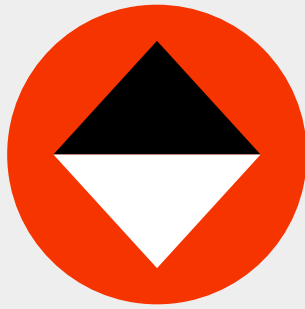
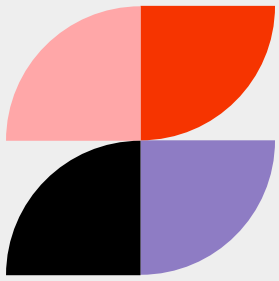
IMPORTANCE OF REFERENCE CHECKS

CULTURAL FIT

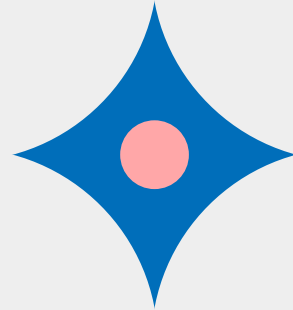
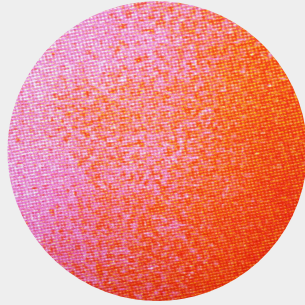
References often provide insight into whether the candidate aligns with your organization's values and work culture.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Helps to uncover potential red flags, such as past performance issues or unethical behavior, and reduces the likelihood of hiring someone with a problematic history.



LEGALITY





LEGALITY OF REFERENCE CHECKS

FOR THE PERSON CONDUCTING THE CHECK

Employers conducting reference checks must adhere to the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), which requires written consent from the candidate before contacting references, especially if you're using third-party services (like background check companies).

FOR THE PERSON RECEIVING THE CALL

References are generally protected by confidentiality laws, but they should be careful not to disclose any confidential or privileged information, such as personal health or discrimination-related matters. It's common for references to avoid sharing negative details unless asked directly or compelled by law.



LEGALITY OF REFERENCE CHECKS

DISCRIMINATION & BIAS

It's essential to ensure that the reference check process is free from bias or discriminatory practices. For example, it's illegal to ask about a candidate's age, race, religion, gender, or other protected characteristics.

DEFAMATION RISK

References can be held liable for defamation if they provide false or malicious information about a candidate. However, as long as the information shared is truthful and relevant, they are generally protected.



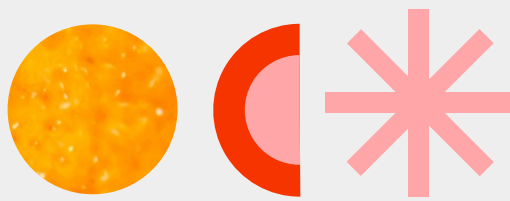
LEGALITY OF REFERENCE CHECKS

TRUTHFUL & PERFORMANCE-RELATED INFORMATION

Under the Illinois Employment Record Disclosure Act, employers who provide information about a current or former employee's job performance are presumed to be acting in good faith, provided the information is truthful or believed in good faith to be truthful. This presumption offers immunity from civil liability for such disclosures.

DEFAMATION CONCERNS

While employers can share negative information, it must be truthful and related to job performance. Sharing false information can lead to defamation claims.



LEGALITY OF REFERENCE CHECKS

SALARY HISTORY PROHIBITION

The Illinois Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from requesting or requiring a job applicant's wage or salary history as a condition of employment or during the application process. This includes inquiries made to the applicant or their current or former employers.

CRIMINAL HISTORY CONSIDERATIONS

Employers with 15 or more employees are restricted from inquiring about an applicant's criminal history until the individual is deemed qualified and selected for an interview. Additionally, the Employee Background Fairness Act prohibits disqualifying applicants based solely on conviction records unless a substantial relationship to the position exists or hiring the individual would pose an unreasonable risk.



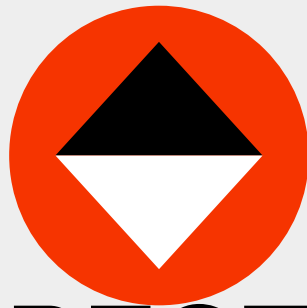
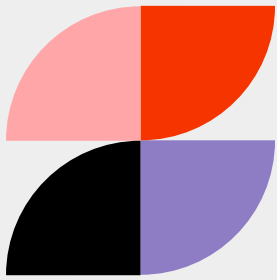
IASPA
Illinois Association of School
Personnel Administrators



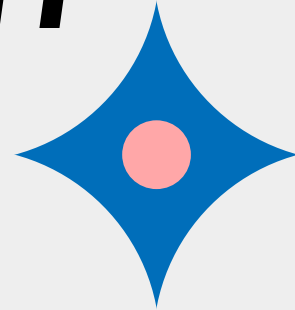
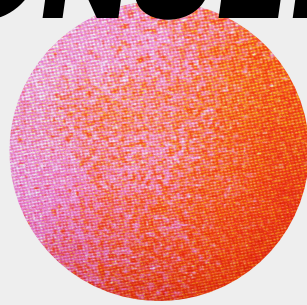
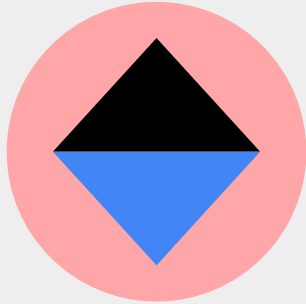
LEGALITY OF REFERENCE CHECKS

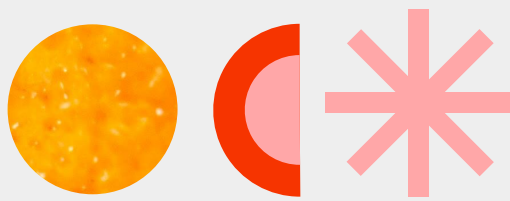
CREDIT HISTORY RESTRICTIONS

The Employee Credit Privacy Act generally prohibits employers from inquiring about an applicant's credit history or obtaining their credit report during pre-employment background checks, unless the position meets specific criteria where such information is a bona fide occupational requirement.



**BEST
PRACTICES
CONSENT**





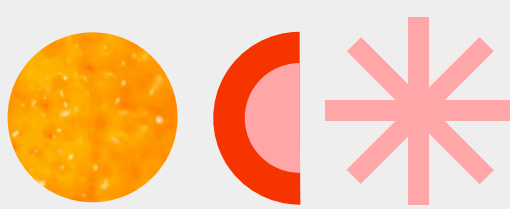
OBTAIN WRITTEN CONSENT

GET WRITTEN/DIGITAL PERMISSION

Always obtain the candidate's consent before conducting reference checks. Many employers **include this in the job application** or as a separate signed release form.

CLARIFY THE PROCESS

Remind the candidate that reference checks are a condition of hire.



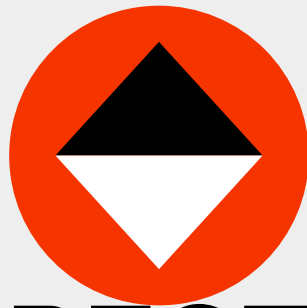
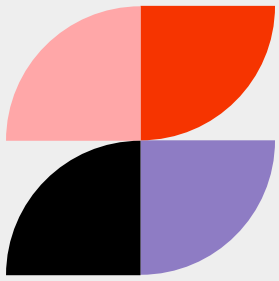
OBTAIN WRITTEN CONSENT

MORE REFERENCES THAN WHAT THE CANDIDATE LISTED?

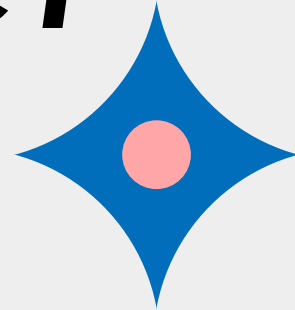
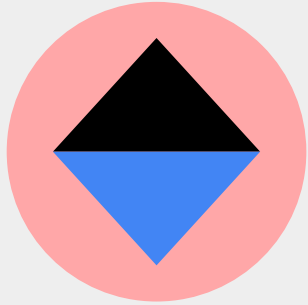
Always inform the candidate that you will contact additional references beyond what they listed to avoid any legal issues or ethical concerns. **DO THIS IN THE APPLICATION.**

JOB RELEVANCE

If you contact extra references, make sure they can speak to the candidate's skills and experience directly relevant to the position you are hiring for.



**BEST
PRACTICES
CONTACT**





CONTACT THE RIGHT REFERENCES

PRIORITIZE DIRECT SUPERVISORS

Speak with administrators or supervisors rather than colleagues or personal references.

VERIFY EMPLOYMENT DETAILS

Ensure that you confirm previous job title, dates of employment, and **reason for leaving**.



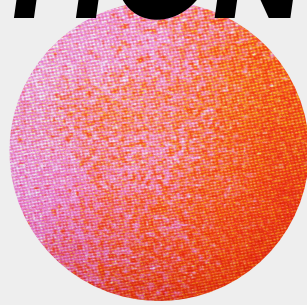
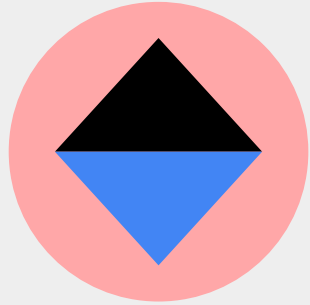
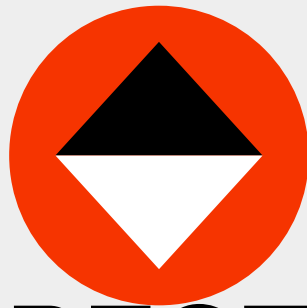
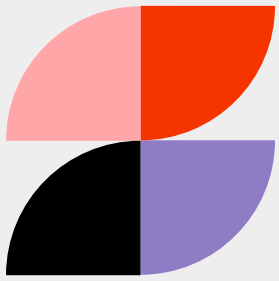
IASPA
Illinois Association of School
Personnel Administrators



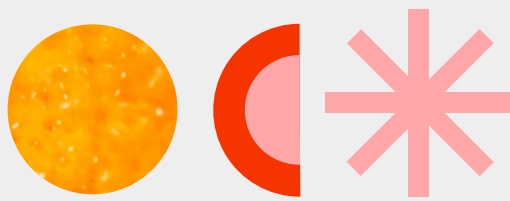
CONTACT THE RIGHT REFERENCES

MULTIPLE REFERENCES ARE A MUST

One reference may not provide the full picture, so aim to speak with at least two or three people who worked closely with the candidate.



**BEST
PRACTICES
QUESTION TYPE**



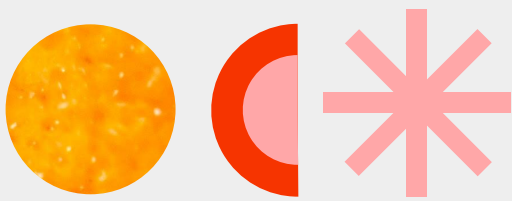
ASK OPEN ENDED, JOB RELEVANT QUESTIONS

AVOID YES/NO QUESTIONS

Encourage detailed responses with open-ended prompts. **"Can you tell me more about that?"**

FOCUS ON JOB PERFORMANCE & BEHAVIOR

Ask about the candidate's strengths, weaknesses, and work style.



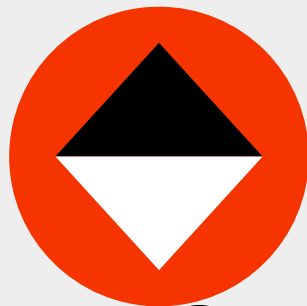
IASPA
Illinois Association of School
Personnel Administrators



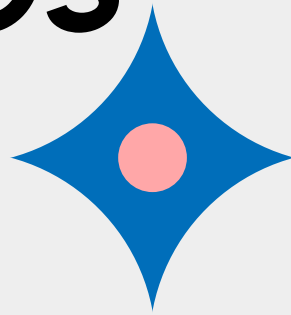
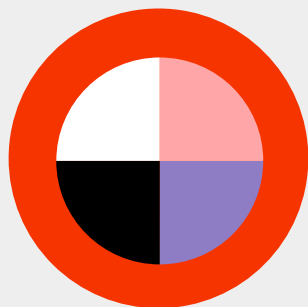
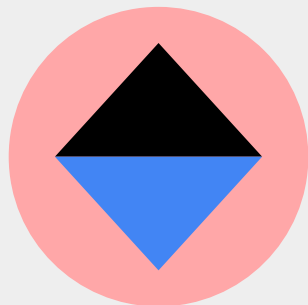
ASK OPEN ENDED, JOB RELEVANT QUESTIONS

USE BEHAVIORAL-BASED QUESTIONS

Request **specific examples** of past performance rather than general opinions.



**BEST
PRACTICES
*RED FLAGS***





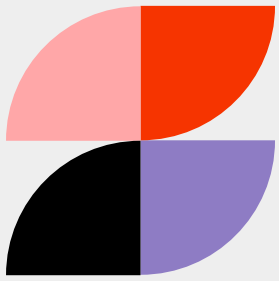
LOOK FOR RED FLAGS - READ BETWEEN THE LINES

AVOID PROTECTED CATEGORIES

Do **NOT** ask about age, race, religion, disability, marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristics.

MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY

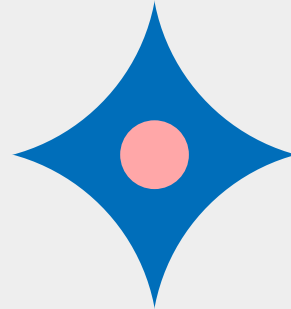
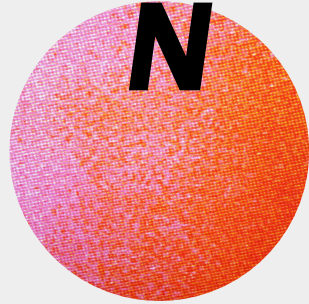
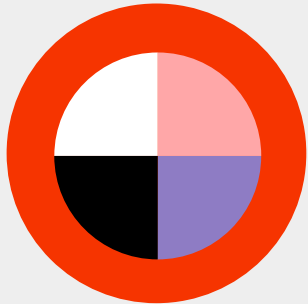
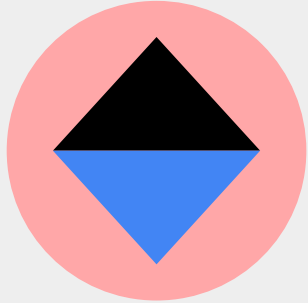
Keep reference check information secure and only share it with those involved in the hiring decision.

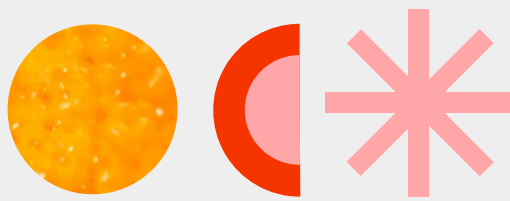


BEST

PRACTICES

DOCUMENTATIO





DOCUMENT & USE INFORMATION WISELY

TAKE CLEAR NOTES

Maintain records of all reference conversations for future review, **especially if challenged.**

LOOK FOR CONSISTENT THEMES

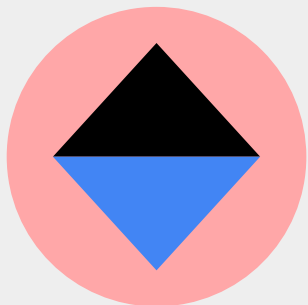
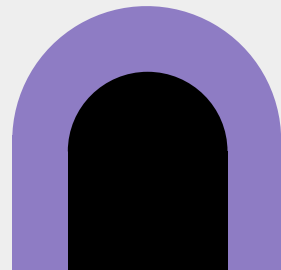
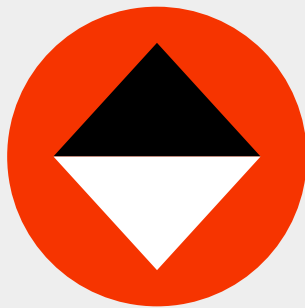
Pay attention to repeated strengths or concerns across multiple references.



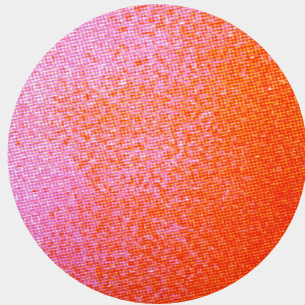
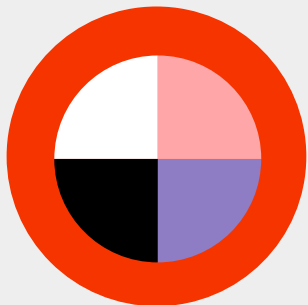
DOCUMENT & USE INFORMATION WISELY

MAKE A BALANCED DECISION

Use reference checks as one **IMPORTANT** part of the hiring process, alongside interviews, work samples, and background checks.



DISHONESTY





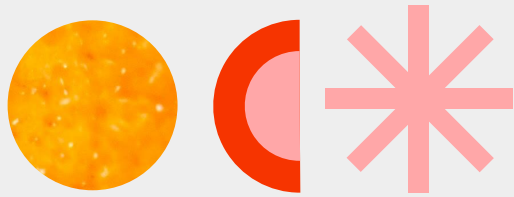
CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CANDIDATE

JOB OFFER RESCINDED

If an employer discovers false information before hiring, they may withdraw the job offer.

TERMINATION AFTER HIRING

If the dishonesty is uncovered after hiring, the employer may fire the employee for falsifying their application. Many companies include honesty clauses in their hiring policies, making dishonesty grounds for dismissal.



CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CANDIDATE

DAMAGE TO REPUTATION & FUTURE JOB PROSPECTS

Recruiters and hiring managers may share concerns informally within their industry, making it harder for the candidate to secure future employment.

LEGAL CONSEQUENCES

If the candidate falsified credentials (e.g., fake degrees or licensure), they could face legal action for fraud.



CONSEQUENCES FOR THE EMPLOYER

RISK OF NEGLIGENT HIRING

If an employer fails to verify employment history and hires an unqualified candidate, they could be held liable if the employee causes harm (e.g., financial fraud, safety violations).

WORKPLACE DISRUPTIONS

If an employee lied about relevant experience, they may struggle to perform job duties, leading to decreased productivity and morale.



CONSEQUENCES FOR THE EMPLOYER

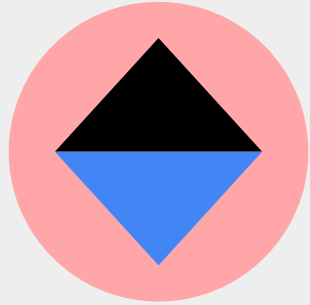
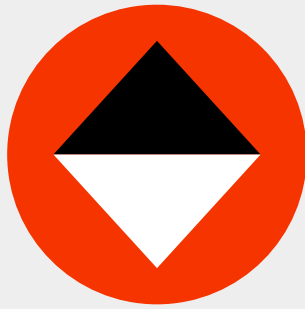
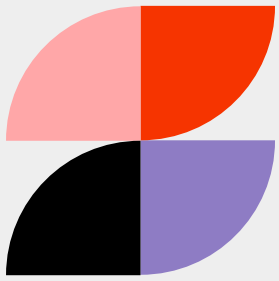
LEGAL & COMPLIANCE ISSUES

If an employer fails to verify credentials and the employee engages in misconduct, the company could face regulatory penalties.

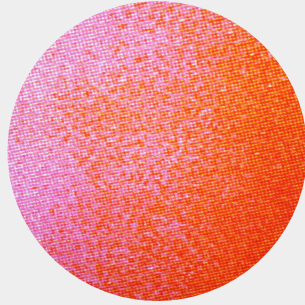
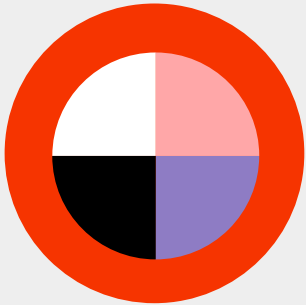


Dishonesty about past employment is a serious red flag that can undermine trust between employers and employees. Employers should take proactive steps to **verify credentials/skills/behaviors**, while candidates should recognize that honesty is always the best policy.





QUESTION STYLE





WHAT QUESTIONS ARE YOU ASKING?

QUESTION QUALITY MATTERS

Well-constructed reference check questions are a powerful tool for hiring exceptional educators who will positively impact students, staff, and the school community.

Also, determine what a quality response includes and what red flag responses sound like.

REDUCES HIRING RISKS

By exploring real examples of past performance, schools can avoid candidates who may struggle with classroom management, adaptability, or teamwork.



WHAT QUESTIONS ARE YOU ASKING?

CONFIRMS CULTURAL FIT

Understanding how an educator interacts with students, parents, and colleagues ensures alignment with the school's mission and values.

UNCOVERS POTENTIAL GROWTH

Effective reference checks highlight not just what a candidate has done, but their willingness and ability to evolve as an educator.



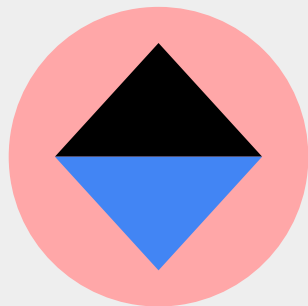
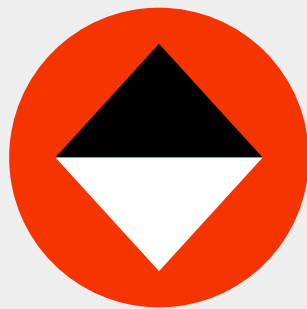
WHAT QUESTIONS ARE YOU ASKING?

DETECTS RED FLAGS EARLY

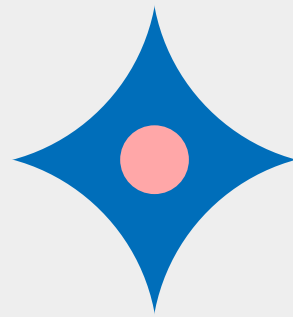
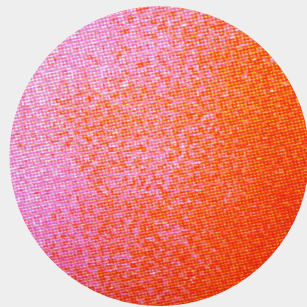
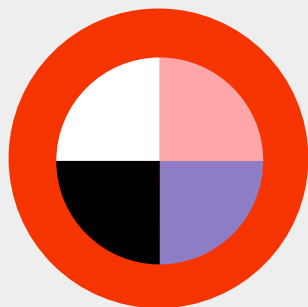
Standard "yes/no" questions won't reveal concerns about professionalism, reliability, or ethical considerations, but well-structured questions will.

IDENTIFIES AUTHENTIC STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Specific questions provide deeper insights into a candidate's ability to manage challenges, collaborate, and contribute to a school or district.



SAMPLE ?'s



#1 - IF YOU COULD PLACE THIS EDUCATOR IN ANY ROLE WITHIN YOUR DISTRICT, WHAT ROLE WOULD YOU CHOOSE AND WHY?

Ideal Response: The reference describes a role that aligns with the candidate's strengths, such as curriculum leadership, mentoring new teachers, or working with diverse learners. They provide specific examples of impact.

Red Flags: Hesitation or suggesting a non-teaching role, implying the candidate may not have been a strong classroom leader.

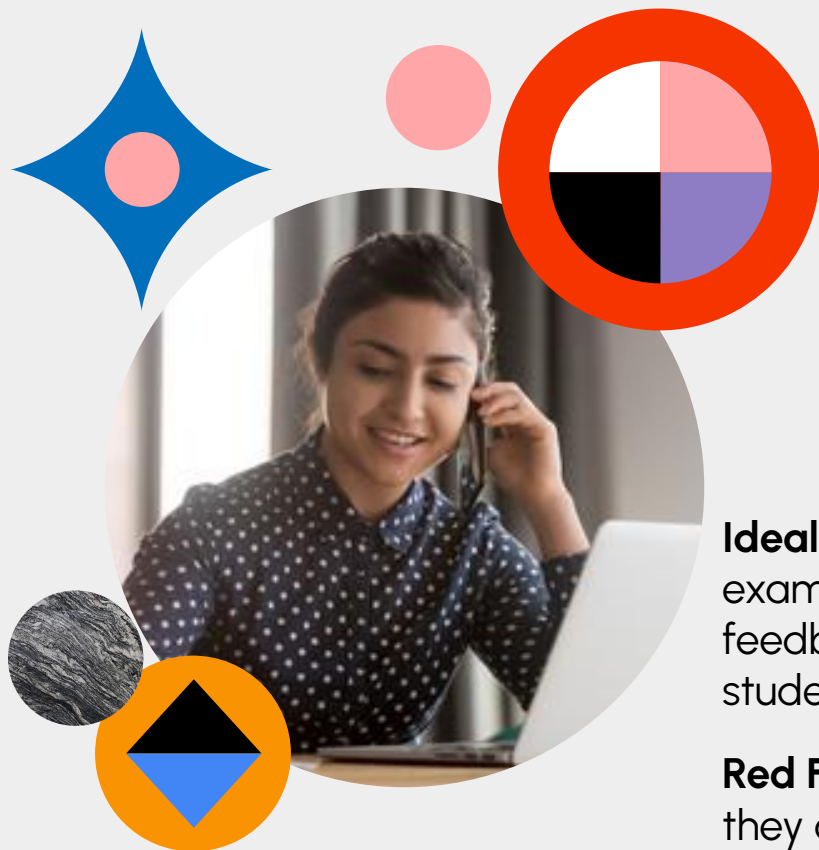


A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a central circular photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue patterned shirt, smiling while talking on a headset and looking at a laptop. Surrounding this central image are several geometric shapes: a blue four-pointed star with a pink circle in the center (top left), a solid pink circle (top center), a large orange circle with a white-to-black-to-pink-to-purple gradient (top right), a grey textured circle (bottom left), and an orange circle with a black-to-blue gradient triangle (bottom center).

#2 HOW DID THIS EDUCATOR CONTRIBUTE TO THE SCHOOL CULTURE AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT?

Ideal Response: The reference highlights involvement beyond the classroom—leading clubs, mentoring students, fostering inclusive environments, or organizing community events.

Red Flags: Generic statements like “they were friendly,” or a lack of contributions outside their direct job duties.



#3 TELL ME ABOUT A TIME THIS EDUCATOR RECEIVED CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK. HOW DID THEY RESPOND?

Ideal Response: The reference provides a concrete example, showing the candidate's ability to accept feedback, adjust their teaching practices, and improve student outcomes.

Red Flags: Defensive reactions, an inability to recall a time they adjusted, or a pattern of ignoring feedback.



#4 IF THIS EDUCATOR HAS STAYED LONGER, WHAT AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH WOULD YOU HAVE ENCOURAGED?

Ideal Response: The reference mentions skill refinement (e.g., differentiated instruction, classroom management, leadership development) and emphasizes that the candidate was already taking steps to improve.

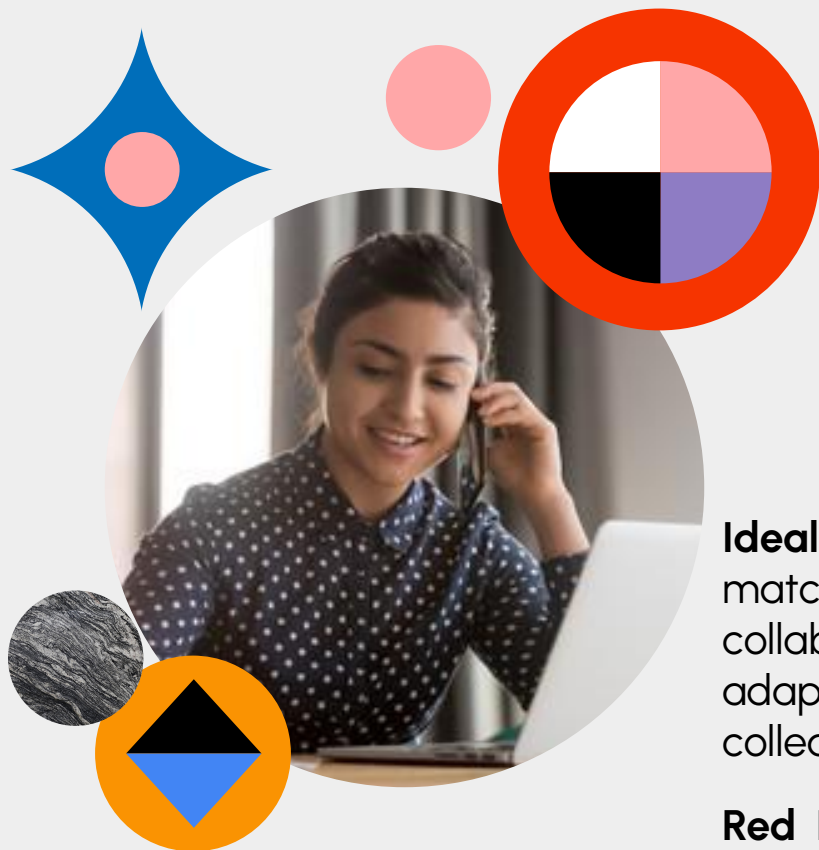
Red Flags: Major gaps in instructional skills or classroom management that were never addressed.

#5 WHAT UNIQUE STRENGTH DID THIS EDUCATOR BRING TO THE SCHOOL THAT YOU DIDN'T REALIZE YOU NEEDED?

Ideal Response: The reference describes an impactful quality—strong parent communication, trauma-informed practices, innovative lesson design—that made a tangible difference in the school.

Red Flags: The reference struggles to identify a specific strength or only mentions surface-level qualities.





#6 WHAT KIND OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT OR PRINCIPAL DOES THIS EDUCATOR THRIVE UNDER?

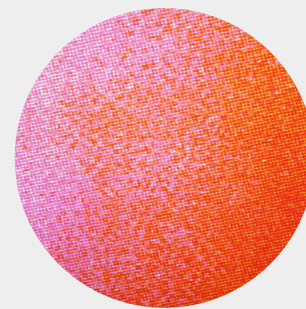
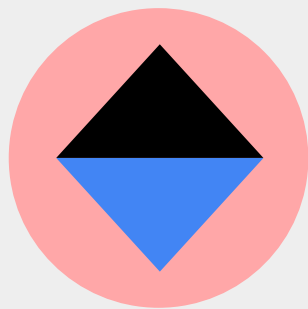
Ideal Response: The reference describes a setting that matches the hiring district's culture, such as a collaborative, student-centered school. They highlight adaptability and the ability to work with diverse colleagues.

Red Flags: The candidate needs constant supervision, struggles with teamwork, or doesn't align with the hiring district's values.



BIRDWALK WITH ME?

Letters of Recommendation



DALE'S PSA #4

***"CUE UP THE SHANIA TWAIN BECAUSE
LETTERS OF REC...THEY DON'T IMPRESS ME
MUCH"***



IASPA
Illinois Association of School
Personnel Administrators



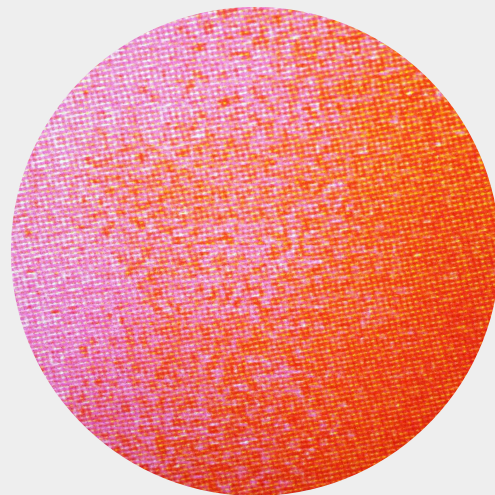
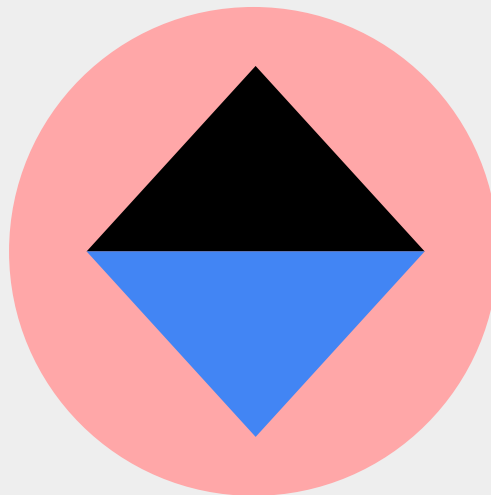


Letters of recommendation often lack honesty, relying on vague praise or coded language to avoid negative remarks. They can be biased, overly generic, copied/pasted, part of a separation agreement, AI generated, and/or fail to reflect actual job performance. Without careful scrutiny, these letters may mislead hiring teams, **making thorough reference checks essential** for true candidate evaluation.

Also, who controls which letters of rec are submitted? **THE CANDIDATE!**



IASPA
Illinois Association of School
Personnel Administrators





READING BETWEEN THE LINES

tone & word choice

Look for subtle clues in the tone or phrasing. For example, phrases like "I can recommend [Candidate] with reservations" or "I have no reason to believe [Candidate] won't succeed" can be signs of hesitation or lack of enthusiasm.

VAGUENESS

A lack of specific examples can indicate a lukewarm endorsement. Strong letters typically highlight the candidate's accomplishments, work ethic, and contributions to the team.



READING BETWEEN THE LINES

LACK OF PERSONAL INSIGHT

If the letter focuses only on the candidate's job title or duties without offering any personal insight into the candidate's character or impact, it may be a sign of a weak recommendation.

RED FLAGS

Be cautious of letters that focus solely on the candidate's technical skills without mentioning interpersonal qualities, leadership ability, or overall fit for the role.



Weak #1 - The Vague, Useless Letter

Problem: *This letter provides no meaningful details about the candidate's skills or performance.*

To Whom It May Concern,

I am pleased to write this letter on behalf of [Candidate Name]. I have known [Candidate] for some time, and they have always been a part of our organization. They were responsible for various tasks and were present regularly.

I hope this letter helps with your decision-making process. Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,



WHAT'S WRONG?



Lacks specific examples of achievements or strengths.

Could apply to literally anyone.

Offers no real endorsement, just neutral filler language.





Weak #2 - The Overly Cautious, Subtle Warning Letter

Problem: *The reference appears positive at first but contains red flags upon closer reading.*

To Whom It May Concern,

[Candidate Name] worked under my supervision for two years at [Company Name]. During that time, they fulfilled the basic requirements of the position and were present as expected. They completed their work on time and met the necessary expectations.

I have no major concerns about [Candidate]'s performance, and I have no reason to believe that they wouldn't be able to contribute to a workplace in some capacity.

Sincerely,



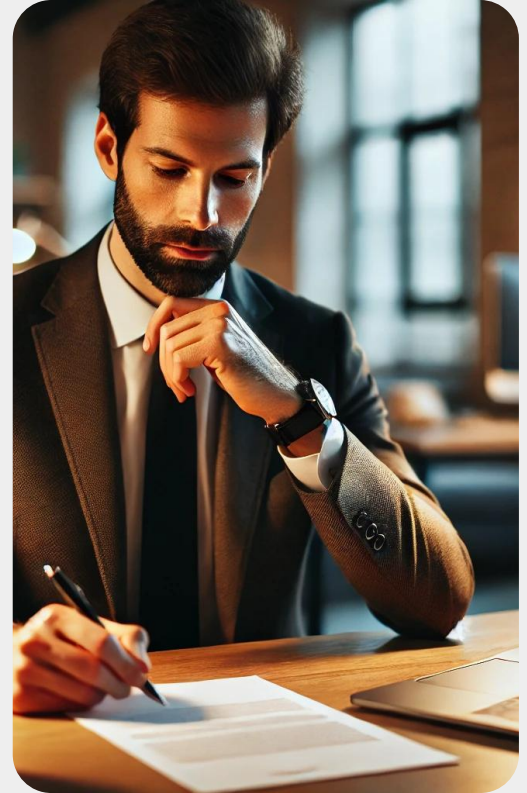
WHAT'S WRONG?



Phrases like "fulfilled the basic requirements" and "no major concerns" suggest mediocrity.

The phrase "in some capacity" implies a lack of strong skills or direction.

The author does not explicitly recommend hiring them.





Weak #3 - The Backhanded Compliment Letter

Problem: *This letter tries to sound positive but ultimately raises doubts about the candidate's professionalism and attitude.*

To Whom It May Concern,

[Candidate Name] is one of the most unique employees I have ever worked with. Their confidence and strong opinions make them stand out in any setting. While their approach may not always align with team goals, they bring a different perspective to the table.

[Candidate] works best in an environment where they can operate independently. With the right guidance and a well-structured system, they have the potential to succeed.

Warm Regards,



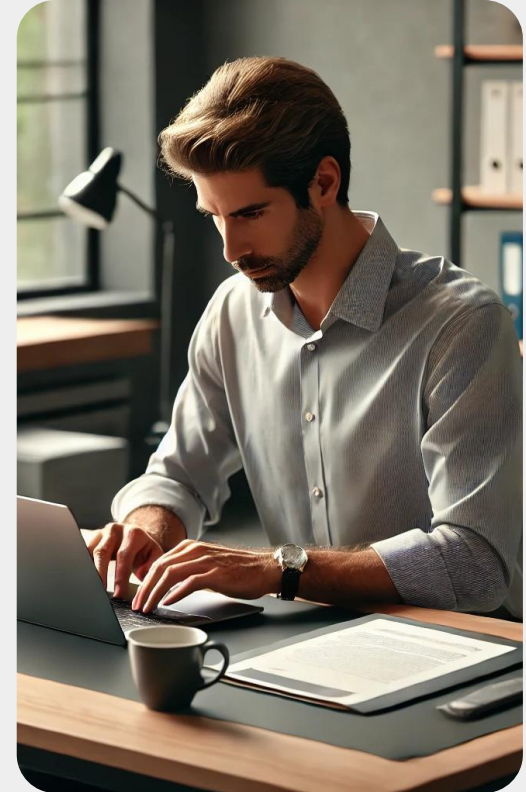
WHAT'S WRONG?



Words like "unique" and "different perspective" suggest difficulty fitting into a team.

"Works best independently" may hint at poor collaboration or difficulty taking direction.

"With the right guidance" implies they need a lot of supervision.





Weak #4 - The "Saying Nothing by Saying a Lot" Letter

Problem: *This letter is filled with generic statements and avoids committing to a real recommendation.*

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am writing to provide a reference for [Candidate Name]. [He/she] worked her from [date-to-date]. In my time working with them, I have observed their presence in the workplace and their participation in various activities. [Candidate] interacted with their colleagues and completed assigned work in a manner consistent with company policies.

It is always a pleasure to see employees grow in their roles, and I believe that [Candidate] has the opportunity to do the same in the right environment. Please let me know if you require any additional details.

Sincerely,



WHAT'S WRONG?



Completely non-committal.

Describes passive observations rather than praising specific skills.

No real endorsement—just vague statements about "presence" and "opportunity."





Strong #1 - The Enthusiastic, Detailed Endorsement

Problem it Solves: *Avoids vagueness and generic statements by highlighting specific strengths.*

To Whom It May Concern,

I am honored to write this letter of recommendation for [Candidate Name]. Having worked with [Candidate] for three years at [Company Name], I can confidently say that they are one of the most dedicated and innovative professionals I have encountered.

As a [Job Title], [Candidate] consistently demonstrated outstanding problem-solving abilities, keen attention to detail, and a commitment to excellence. One of their most impressive accomplishments was leading a project that included adopting a new curriculum and providing professional development. Their ability to analyze complex challenges and develop practical solutions is truly exceptional.

Beyond their teaching skills, [Candidate] is a natural leader who fosters collaboration and inspires those around them. Their positive attitude and ability to communicate effectively make them a valuable asset to any team. I wholeheartedly recommend [Candidate] for [Position Name] and am confident that they will exceed your expectations.



WHAT'S RIGHT?



Clearly states the candidate's strengths.

Provides a specific example of success.

Expresses strong enthusiasm and a confident recommendation.





Strong #2 - The Personal Impact Letter

Problem it Solves: *Captures the candidate's character and work ethic beyond just skills.*

Dear Hiring Manager,

I have had the privilege of working alongside [Candidate Name] for the past four years, and I can confidently say that they are a truly outstanding individual—both professionally and personally.

[Candidate] is the kind of person who goes above and beyond expectations, not only completing tasks with excellence but also uplifting those around them. When our team faced a major deadline crunch last year, [Candidate] took the initiative to reorganize responsibilities, ensuring that the project was completed on time without sacrificing quality. Their leadership, adaptability, and unwavering dedication make them an asset to any organization.

But beyond their skills, what sets [Candidate] apart is their integrity and ability to create a positive work environment. They bring energy and thoughtfulness to every interaction, making even the most challenging projects enjoyable.

Without hesitation, I highly recommend [Candidate] for this position. They will undoubtedly bring the same passion and excellence to your organization as they have to ours.



WHAT'S RIGHT?



Highlights leadership and teamwork.

Provides a compelling anecdote.

Emphasizes personal qualities that contribute to workplace success.





Strong #3 - The Skills & Growth-Focused Letter

Problem it Solves: Shows a candidate's ability to grow and adapt, making them a strong long-term hire.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am thrilled to recommend [Candidate Name] for [Position Name]. Over the past two years, I have watched them grow from a capable employee into an exceptional leader within our organization. Their ability to quickly learn, adapt, and innovate is unparalleled.

When [Candidate] joined our team as a [Previous Role], they immediately demonstrated a strong work ethic and a passion for improvement. Within a short time, they took on additional responsibilities, streamlined processes, and mentored new hires—proving their natural leadership abilities. Their contributions directly led to a 20% increase in department efficiency and improved overall team morale.

[Candidate] is not just a high performer; they are a team player who brings out the best in those around them. Their curiosity, problem-solving mindset, and commitment to excellence make them a standout candidate. I highly recommend them and am confident they will be a tremendous asset to your team.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you need any additional insights.



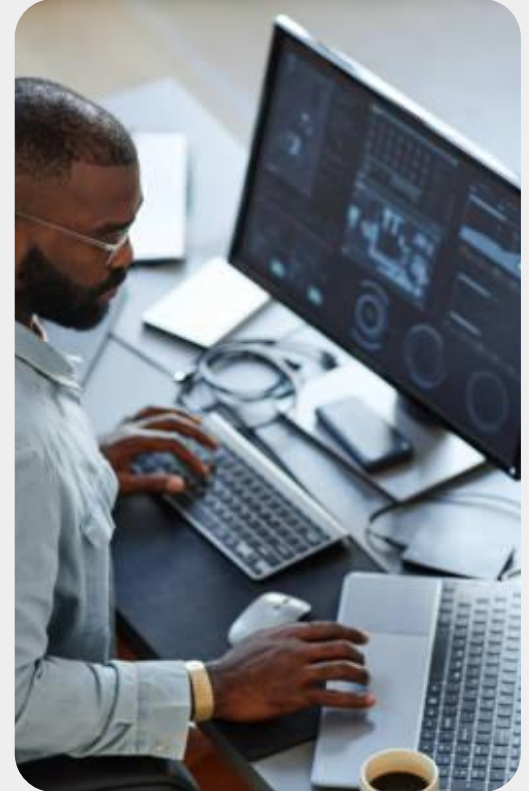
WHAT'S RIGHT?



Highlights growth and adaptability.

Uses quantifiable achievements.

Shows leadership potential.





Strong #4 - The Short & Powerful Recommendation

Problem it Solves: Concise but impactful for when time is limited.

Dear [Hiring Manager's Name],

I am excited to recommend [Candidate Name] for [Position Name]. In the three years we worked together at [Company], I consistently saw their dedication, innovation, and leadership in action.

One of their most impressive contributions was [specific example—leading a project, solving a problem, mentoring a colleague]. Their ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and execute flawlessly made a lasting impact on our team.

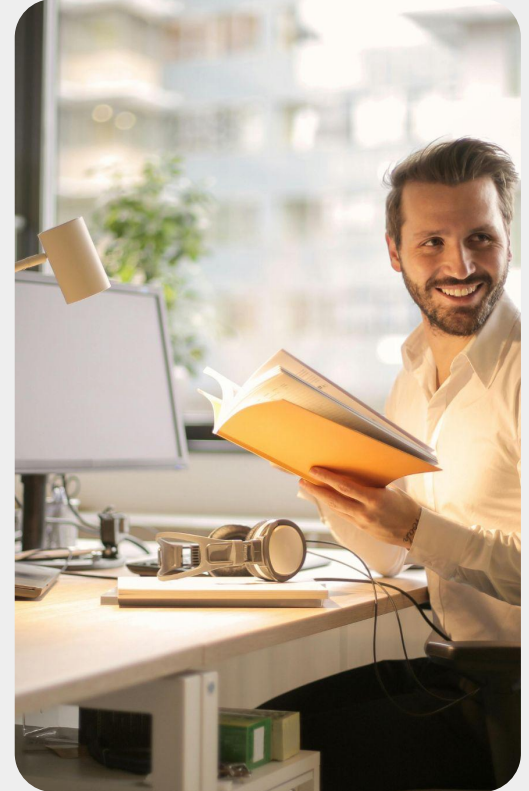
I have no doubt that [Candidate] will bring the same energy and excellence to your organization. They are a rare find, and I strongly encourage you to consider them for this role.

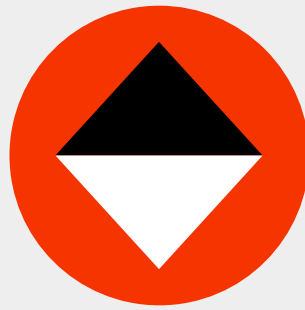
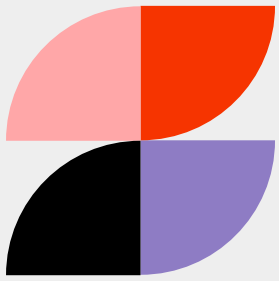


WHAT'S RIGHT?



Concise yet enthusiastic.
Includes a specific example.
Strong closing statement.





FOLLOW-UP?

Contact:

dfisher@dps109.org

