Reference checking allows you to ensure that you are finding the most qualified person who is a good match for the position. It also allows for greater insights into the candidate’s knowledge, skills and abilities from someone who has observed the candidate’s performance. By conducting effective reference checks, you can avoid failed probationary periods and poor performance which can impact students, operations and overall reputation of Simon Fraser University.

There are **3 Basic Steps** to effective reference checking:

**Step 1 – PLAN & PREPARE**
- **Consider the kind of information you want** – It is your responsibility, not the referee’s, to evaluate the information provided in relation to the qualifications for the position. What may be undesirable in the eyes of the person you are speaking with may be just what you are looking for.
- **How are you going to go about getting the information** – Develop a variety of specific questions that will get at incidents, behaviours and examples that are relevant to the qualifications of the position. Review the sample questions provided but ensure that your questions are specific to the position for which you are recruiting.
- **Who are you going to contact** – During the interview process, attain consent from the candidate to contact their references. Choose references that have had a good opportunity to observe the candidate and are able to provide facts and examples of the candidate’s work. General guideline is to obtain 3 work related reference from direct supervisors and don’t just focus on the references that the candidate provides. Ask the candidate if you can contact their most recent supervisor. If you can’t reach someone, ask the candidate if you can speak to another reference.

**Step 2 – GATHER THE INFORMATION**
- Be very familiar with the candidate’s file.
- Check with the referee if they will agree to provide you with a reference and that it is not being given in confidence (i.e., if you were asked to share the information, you could do so).
- Tell the referee why you contacted them and explain the responsibilities of the position.
- Follow your plan and check off questions or topics as you go to ensure you don’t miss anything.
- Don’t let opinions substitute for facts and examples. Take note of opinions but make sure you get the facts.
- Take good notes to allow you to effectively evaluate the information. Not just of their responses but also of your impressions.
- Be alert to: unusual hesitations, ambiguous or evasive responses, overly negative or vindictive responses, or overly enthusiastic responses.
- Don’t be rushed. Ensure that the referee is aware of how long you will need to conduct the reference check. Schedule a follow-up time if needed.

**Step 3 – USE THE INFORMATION**
- Don’t take the information you have gathered strictly as stated – look for patterns.
- Use the information to corroborate and clarify information provided in the interview. Make your final determination based on the candidate’s interview, qualifications and references to get a complete picture.

  *Don’t rely on written references.*

  **Conduct references in-person or on the phone. This will not only ensure they are legitimate but will also allow you to catch hesitation or unscripted remarks, and to ask follow up questions.**

*Remember:* In order to meet Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act requirements, the information gathered from reference checks should be forwarded to Human Resource Services along with resumes and interview notes of both successful and unsuccessful candidates.
Sample Reference Check Questions

It is important to tailor reference check questions to the position and the applicant being considered. This will ensure that your questions get at incidents, behaviours and examples that are relevant to the qualifications for the position. Here are some common questions that may help you to develop your specific reference check plan.

1. What does your company do?
2. What is your reporting relationship with the candidate? If none, in what capacity did you observe the candidate’s work? When did you work with the candidate and for how long?
3. Please describe the key responsibilities of the candidate in their most recent position?
4. Tell me about the candidate’s most important contributions to the achievement of your organization’s mission and goals?
5. Describe the candidate’s relationships with their coworkers, reporting staff and supervisors.
6. What are the candidate’s most significant strengths? Please provide examples?
7. What are the candidate’s weaknesses or areas that need improvement?
8. What were the candidate’s primary duties and responsibilities?
9. How are the candidate’s ___________ (e.g., problem-solving, organizational, interpersonal, communication, leadership) skills? Can you provide an example?
10. How would you rate the candidate’s quality of work and why?
11. What is the candidate’s attitude toward work? How was this demonstrated?
12. What was it like to supervise the candidate?
13. What unique skill did the candidate bring to your organization?
14. In this position, ________ is an essential task. In what way has the candidate demonstrated skill in this area?
15. How is the employee’s attendance record and punctuality?
16. What type of projects was the candidate involved in? How did they contribute to the project?
17. Please describe an example of the candidate going beyond the call of duty.
18. If the candidate were to come and work for us, what kind of professional development opportunities do you think we should offer them?
19. In what type of work environment would the candidate thrive? Where would he/she/they struggle?
20. What other information can you give that would help to develop a complete picture of the candidate?
21. What are your lasting impressions of the candidate?
22. Why did the candidate leave your employment?
23. Is there anything else we should know before making a hiring decision?
24. Would you rehire? If not, why?

Remember: Ensure that you are asking questions that respect individual privacy and human rights. When in doubt, contact your Human Resources Specialist.