

Guide to Writing an Effective

Character Reference

Dear Referee,

Thank you for taking the time to write a character reference for [Title and Name of client].

As you would be aware, [Client] is pleading guilty to the following offences:

[List offences]

A good character reference is an important part of [client]’s case and will help us to persuade the Court to extend as much leniency as possible to him (her).

The functions of an effective character reference are:

1. To show the Court that, despite having committed the offence(s) listed above, [client] is a person of generally good character.
2. Personalise [client] to the Court- so that they become more than just a number in a busy Court list.
3. Where possible, provide context around the circumstances which may have lead up to [client] coming this (these) offence(s).
4. Show the Court that [client] is remorseful for having committed the offences and the impact that his (her) behaviour has had on the victim.

Here are a few points which should help you to write an effective character reference:

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**Do:**

1. Type your reference, if at all possible;
2. Where possible, put your reference on a letterhead;
3. Sign the reference and provide your contact details;
4. Acknowledge that you are aware that [client] has admitted guilt to the offences (please list the offences which you are aware of);
5. Acknowledge that you are aware of the facts of the offence;
6. Acknowledge that you are aware of [client]’s previous criminal [and traffic] record (if any);
7. Explain your relationship with [client] and how long you have known him (her);
8. Explain your opinion of his (her) general character. Please try to illustrate your opinions with examples. General platitudes such as ‘John Smith is an honest, kind and hardworking man’ or similar are generally not very effective. A more effective statement would be: “John is always generous to others, as an example, a few years ago when I ......... he helped me by .......” or: “Jane is a very kind individual, for example, I remember when she........” etc...;
9. If you are aware of anything which may have contributed to [client]’s offending behaviour or may help to explain it or put it in context, please provide an explanation of it;
10. FOR TRAFFIC MATTERS If possible, provide your observations as to [client] being ordinarily a good and careful driver. In particular:
	1. If you or your children often ride in the car with [client] and have no fear for your/their safety when you do, please say so.
	2. For DRINK DRIVING OFFENCES, if you have previously observed [client] taking steps to discourage others from driving after drinking, please mention this.
11. FOR TRAFFIC MATTERS If you are aware of the impact which a disqualification is likely to have on [client]’s employment or other responsibilities, please mention this.
12. If you consider [client]’s offending behaviour to be out of character, please say so;
13. If you have observed any positive changes in [client]’s behaviour or lifestyle since the commission of these offences, please explain it.
14. If [client] has expressed to you his (her) remorse for committing the offences, please say so.

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**Don’t**:

1. Say anything in the reference which you do not believe to be true. Remember that a reference is provided to a Court and must therefore be honest.
2. Go into detail about yourself or your status in life. It is true that a reference from a person of good standing in the community can be very powerful, however if you spend more than one short sentence talking about yourself, you can unintentionally come across as attempting to ‘bignote’ yourself.
3. Suggest to the court what penalty it should impose (or not impose) on [client]. Most Courts consider this disrespectful.

If you have any questions about writing your reference, please feel free to contact Mr Mantaj on (02) 4324 5688 or via email m.mantaj@conditsis.com

Once you have completed your reference, please scan and email to Mr Mantaj or give it to [client].

Thank you for helping us to help [client] secure the best possible outcome to his/her matter.