



# Letter of reference for the EPIC-students

## Information & Guideline for companies

### 1 The letter of recommendation – general information

#### **What is a letter of reference / of recommendation?**

A letter of reference or a letter of recommendation is a written document with a positive judgment about a person. The valuation must be positive, otherwise it doesn't fulfil its purpose. It is used to create a favourable opinion about a person.

Letters of reference / recommendation are typically related to employment, admission to institutions of higher education, or scholarship eligibility which makes them especially important for people who are looking for a job, applying for universities, internships or scholarships as well as for freelancers and self-employed people. In a job offer, it is rarely explicitly required but nevertheless, it is an optional document of an application and can be seen as an additional advertising measure upgrading the application.

A letter of reference is issued in order to recommend a person to others. It can be addressed to a specific addressee (such as a new employer, university admissions officer, etc.) – then the term letter of recommendation suits better – or it may also be issued without specifying an addressee, then it is referred to as a letter of reference. This document will focus on the letter of reference without a specific addressee.

#### **What is the difference to a job reference?**

The difference between a letter of reference and a typical job reference / job certificate is that in many countries a job reference is subject to strict conditions: they are usually written in a specific style which uses determined codes and formulations. It can be compared to a secret language which usually reveals only little about the person's personality. Also, it is often difficult to decipher for people who are not used to it. The rules for job references in terms of language, formulations and codes are different from country to country and may be hard to read in an international context – even if they are translated.

Letters of reference or recommendation, on the other hand, are freely written according to the author's own point of view and personal impressions and therefore allow a deeper look into specific details or enhance special talents and abilities. As they are not subject to any rules, they are of great value in the international context.

#### **When and by whom will a letter of reference be issued?**

The person providing a reference is called a referee. Theoretically, a reference can be issued by anyone. However, to make the letter credible and give it a professional reputation, it is not advisable to have it exhibited by a friend or family member, but rather from a person in a professional or academic context.



A letter of reference in a job application is often written by a former employer or manager, but can also be requested from co-workers, collaboration partners, customers and vendors. Teachers and professors often supply references for students who have taken their classes.

### **Content**

Unlike a job certificate, a reference is written in the first person. It should describe the relationship to the recommended person, his or her skills and abilities and, if possible, as well the person's attitude and personality. By providing a personal touch, reference letters have the ability to fill an often missing information gap in applications.

Although a letter of reference should be positive, too much praise is to be avoided. The letter of recommendation should describe the person and his competences individually, but too many superlatives are suspicious. Highlighting a few positive skills and qualities is enough.

At the end of the letter, there should be an explicit recommendation why the referee considers the recommended person to be suitable. Adding contact details (e-mail-address and/or a phone number) and the offer of getting in touch in case of further questions, underlines the credibility of the letter. The whole document should not exceed a DinA4 page, and rather be short and concise.

## **2 Benefits for the EPIC-students**

### **International work context**

Letters of reference are especially common in the United States, England and other English speaking countries but with the increasing internationalization of the job market, they also become more and more important in Europe and beyond. One reason for that is, that the content is not subject to any rules, but can be freely formulated by the author. Also, the content can be adapted to the respective context, for example they can be issued for a collaboration in a project such as EPIC.

With the participation in the EPIC project, the students gained international experiences in working together with people from other European countries. In order to support them to continue an international career, a letter of reference from a professional in the context of an international project adds a great value to their curriculum.

### **Entering the job market as a young professional**

Reference letters are especially important for recently graduated young professionals at the beginning of their careers, as they usually have no or only a few job certificates (only internships or part-time jobs). The curriculum vitae and the certificates from the universities are a good start but usually they are not very informative and don't reveal much about unique qualities, skills, engagements or personality.

The EPIC project is about applying problem-based-learning and provides the opportunity for some students to work on real case studies from companies. A reference letter from a company certifies the student's experience in dealing with real tasks in a real professional context.



### Applying for further studies, foreign exchanges or scholarships

Letters of reference can also be used in an application for universities (e.g. a Master's Degree), exchange programs or scholarships. Usually they are issued by the professors but a letter from a professional and practical context, even if the students doesn't have relevant work experience, adds more variety to the application – especially as it is from the context of a collaboration project in which the students worked together with companies from different countries.

### Personal value / self-assessment

Finally, a letter of reference is not only an important document in the academic and professional context but is also of personal relevance for the students, as it describes their performance and their attitude in the project. It can be seen as an additional evaluation of their work, which helps them to better assess themselves in order to understand their strengths and weaknesses. A good letter of recommendation can help to increase their self-confidence, which can also be beneficial in their future personal and professional life. A not so good one, won't probably make it into their application but will help them to work on their missing competences.

## 3 The letter of reference for EPIC-students

As the letter of reference for the EPIC-project is not addressed to anyone in specific or is part of a particular application, it can be freely designed in content, as long as it is positive. The most powerful letters provide specific examples and descriptions of the talents and contributions of the person that is recommended.

A letter of reference should have an introduction which explains the background of why the author is writing the letter and which reveals the relationship between the author and the person the letter is about. In this context, the introductory part could contain a summarizing sentence of the EPIC-project and the author's role in the project.

There should also be a final part / conclusion, which summarizes the most important aspects of the letter and offer the possibility to get in contact in case of further questions.

A letter of reference for an EPIC-student could be structured as following:

- The position of the author in respect of the student
  - EPIC project as the context of the reference
  - Position of the referee in the company and role in the project
- Tasks and responsibilities of the student
  - The case study / project the student worked on
  - The role of the student within the project
- The duration of tasks / responsibilities
  - Type and frequency of the cooperation
- Performance of the student
  - The students' qualifications, abilities, knowledge, creativity, intelligence (outstanding aspects)



- Behaviour of the student
  - Social attitude, character traits
- Conclusion
  - Final recommendation sentence
  - Contact details

## 4 Text templates

The following ideas can be used and completed and/or modified according to the needs:

- Dear Sir or Madam / to whom it may concern
- As part of the EU-funded Erasmus + project EPIC – Improving Employability through Internationalisation and Collaboration – **student X** has co-operated with our company **company X**. EPIC aims to improve the employability of students by working on real projects of the private companies.
- My position at **company X** is **job title (and department / responsibilities)**.
- **Company X** provided the project “**Title of the project**” in which I was the supervisor of **student X** and his / her project team members.
- The content of the project “**Title**” was ....
- **Student X** tasks in the project were ....
- During the **X** month **student X** worked on the project, we met / talked regularly (**intervals**) about the progress of the project.
- **Student X** has completed his part of the project to my greatest satisfaction.
- He / she is very talented in ... / has very good skills in ...
- I was very impressed how he / she addressed the problem ... and dealt with it by ...
- He / she is a ..... Person
- The communication / interaction was ....
- The work of **student X** was appreciated a lot by **company X** and the elaborated results will be used in ...
- As far as I got to know **student X**, I would always recommend him / her because of his / her ...
- I wish **student X** good luck on his professional and personal way.
- If there are any other questions, please feel free to contact me.
- Yours sincerely, **XY (Title)**