Sample Reference Checking Questions

Opening
• I’ve been talking to X about a position in my office and s/he has gave me your name because you are familiar with her/his work performance. May I ask you a few questions?
• Is this a good time to talk, or is there a more convenient time when I might call you back?
• Is there another phone number where I can reach you?

Basic
• How long did you work with the applicant?
• What was the applicant’s formal job title and did he/she hold other titles while at your company?
• Why did the applicant leave the company?
• If you had the opportunity, would you rehire this applicant into the same/different job?
• Did you promote this applicant while he/she worked with you?
• Did you have an opportunity to promote this applicant while he/she worked for you?
• How did the applicant learn the job? What training methods would you recommend?
• What support will the applicant need to perform successfully on the job?

Job Content
• Tell me about the applicant’s job. What were his/her primary responsibilities?
• What do you feel are the most important skills needed to succeed in this job?
• Describe a typical day in your department.
• How frequently was the applicant asked to work extra hours?
• Describe how the responsibilities of the applicant changed or increased while he/she was in this job.
• To whom did the applicant report?
• Describe the common verbal/written interaction required for this job.

Supervision
• How would you describe the applicant’s management/supervisory style?
• How is the applicant’s management style different from or similar to your own?
• How would the applicant’s subordinates describe him/her?
• What methods did the applicant use to motivate subordinates?
• What aspects of the applicant’s management style were most effective/least effective?
Performance Level
- How would you compare him/her with others in your department who were performing the same job?
- How would you describe the quality of his/her work? Can you give some examples?
- What would have made the applicant more effective?
- What are the applicant’s strengths?
- How would you describe the applicant’s work style?
- In a few words, how would you summarize this applicant’s job performance?

Skill Area
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s technical skills?
- How would you describe the applicant’s interpersonal and written communication skills?
- What kinds of writing did the applicant do?
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s leadership ability? What leads you to this conclusion?
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s verbal communication skills?
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s conceptual ability?
- Can you give me some examples that demonstrate the applicant’s conceptual ability?
- How would you compare the applicant’s skills with others performing in the same area?

Personal Traits
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s ability to learn and follow directions?
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s ability to take suggestions/criticism?
- Is the applicant flexible? Can you give me an example?
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s ability to pay attention to detail and follow through on a job?
- How would you evaluate the applicant’s ability to demonstrate ingenuity and act on his/her own initiative?
- How would you describe the applicant’s general attitude concerning his/her work?
- Does the applicant accept responsibility? Can you give me an example?

Other
- If I were going to be this applicant’s supervisor, what advice could you give me about how to maximize his/her performance?
- How would you best describe your company’s culture or personality?
- What would you do differently with this applicant if he/she worked for you again?
- What haven’t I asked you that you might be able to tell me about this applicant that would help me better evaluate him/her?
- Who else in the company might be able to give me some insight into this applicant’s work?
- What advice could you give me about how to best motivate this applicant?
- What is the best path for developing this applicant’s skills further?