

## Would you please write me a reference?

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A girl from your Unit has just approached you for a reference. She says she wants to apply for next summer's provincially sponsored trip. You agree.

A week later, you sit down with a cup of coffee to work on the reference. But now you aren't sure what to say or how much detail to go into. What should you do?

Writing a reference for a girl in your Unit, a girl you have camped with, or a fellow Guider, is a big responsibility. Whether the applicant is applying for an international trip, a volunteer position at a World Centre, or an interprovincial camping event, the selections committee for that event is relying on you to provide an accurate picture of the applicant. The selections committee won't know the applicant's name or know what she looks like, but they will form a picture of her based in large part on your words.

The first thing you should do if asked to give a reference is to find out about the event or position for which the applicant is applying. The activities at the event, or the responsibilities of the position, may affect what you say, or even your decision about whether to act as a reference. For instance, if the event is a camping event, but you have never attended a camp with the applicant, you may not be an appropriate reference for the applicant. Her needs may be better served by finding another reference, and you should not be afraid to say so.

Once you have learned about the event or position, sit down with the applicant and review the reference form together. Make sure you understand what the questions are asking. If the reference is for an international event, review the form "Reference Guidelines – Girl Member" or "Reference Guidelines – Adult Member," whichever is applicable. Both forms are available at [www.forms.girlguides.ca](http://www.forms.girlguides.ca). These guidelines will give you very specific instructions about how to complete the forms.

The applicant should provide you with a copy of the required reference form to work with. If you are providing a reference for an international event, you will have to complete Form STG.2 (or STA.2, if the applicant is an adult). Answer each question completely and give specific examples of each behaviour. For instance, for the question, "How does she get along with her peers?" you could answer:

*She gets along well with her peers.*

Although this technically answers the question, it doesn't assist the selections committee in forming a picture of the girl. A better answer would be:

*She gets along well with her peers. She has a cheerful and friendly personality and listens carefully to what her friends have to say. She does not need to have her own way all the time and is willing to make compromises. She is not usually the leader in the group but is a team player.*

It may help you to make a draft while you are thinking about how to answer each question, and only complete a final version once you have decided exactly what you want to say.

Please be sure not to mention the applicant's name in your reference. For international events, if the applicant's name appears on the reference, the selections chair must delete it everywhere it appears before providing the reference form to the selections committee. This is a lot of work! The selections chair will be very happy if she does not need to do this.

For both camping and international events, the most important question on the reference form is, "Do you fully believe the applicant is a suitable candidate for this event?" (or a similar question). Please answer truthfully, and think about the specific event that the applicant is applying for. If you have any doubts as to her suitability for that particular event, please answer "no." The reference is confidential so the applicant will not know how you have answered this question.

What should you do if you are asked to give a reference for someone who you really do not think is suitable or who may not be ready for the experience? In that situation, you have two options: you can suggest to the applicant that you may not be the best person to give the reference, or you can agree to give the reference but be honest about the applicant's shortcomings. The choice is yours, but please remember that if an unsuitable participant is selected for an event, it can affect not only that participant, but all those around her and the success of the event as a whole.

After you have written the reference, you should not return it to the applicant. It must remain confidential. If you are submitting the reference in paper format, you should place it in a sealed envelope, sign your name across the flap, and send it directly to the selections committee at the address provided by the applicant. If you are submitting the reference in electronic format, you should e-mail it directly to the selections committee at the address provided by the applicant, but do not copy the applicant on your e-mail.

Writing a reference can be a very rewarding experience, especially if the applicant is selected for the event! We encourage you to take on this challenge and help create amazing experiences for your Guiding sisters.