

Character Reference Guide

General Tips for Character References:

- Approach people who you are familiar with and can attest to your good character. The ideal referee will be someone who knows you well and has known you for a considerable amount of time – for instance, an employer, family friend, colleague, teacher, sports coach, or church minister. If you do not feel comfortable approaching someone like this, a friend or family member is fine.
- The focus of the reference should be on your good character, and the fact that your actions are out of character. Your referee should not spend time talking about the circumstances of the offence (this is a job for your lawyer), or any other irrelevant information.
- **Please ensure your referee does not comment about the type of penalty they think is appropriate** (e.g. *John needs a section 10 because a criminal conviction will have a negative impact on his job*). This is because the sentencing exercise is a matter for the magistrate or judge only.
- Keep them short and sweet – we recommend no more than one page.

How Do I Write a Reference?

- **Please remember the following is a guide only – do not simply copy and paste!**
- Try to have the reference on a letterhead if possible.
- Always address the reference ‘*To the Presiding Magistrate*’ (if in the Local Court), or ‘*To the Presiding Judge*’ (if in the District Court).
- Have the referee write a little bit about themselves – e.g. how old they are, what they do for a job, any community involvement that they may have (soccer coach, church groups, volunteering). For example:
 - *My name is Bob White and I am providing this character reference for John Smith for his upcoming court matter. I am 52 years old, and I am a qualified accountant by trade. I also regularly volunteer with the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal and Manly Surf Life Saving Club.*
- Have them write about how they met you and how long they have known you for – for example:
 - *I have known John for 8 years. We first met while volunteering at the Manly Surf Lifesaving Club.*
- The referee must explicitly state that they are aware you have been charged with the offence in question, and that you intend to plead guilty to the offence – for instance:
 - *I understand John has been charged with, and intends to plead guilty to, the offence of drug possession.*
- They should say something how the offence was disclosed to them, and about the fact that this is out of character – for example:

- *I was shocked when John called me to inform me that he had been charged with this offence. I have never known John to be a drug user or to engage in any illegal activity, and he has always displayed respect for the law.*
- They should include a brief description about you and your work and community commitments, for instance:
 - *John coaches his son's Under 12's football team and acts as a role model to his two children and their teammates. He is also employed full-time as a builder and is the sole income earner for his family, as his wife is a stay at home parent. Each year he volunteers with the Red Cross Appeal and regularly devotes time to the Manly Surf Lifesaving Club as a volunteer lifesaver.*
- They should say something about the fact that you are remorseful, and any steps taken to rectify your actions – for example:
 - *I have spoken to John at length about his actions. John has told me that he is extremely embarrassed and ashamed of his actions. He is especially worried about the impact this offence could have on his future career prospects. He has told me that he has spent considerable time reflecting upon his conduct, and that he has spoken with his GP and a counsellor about his drug use. He tells me that he is committed to ceasing drug use completely.*
- If your referee is your employer and a criminal conviction/licence disqualification could affect your job, they may want to write something like:
 - *John is concerned about the impact this offence could have on his job. Our company regularly conducts criminal record checks and any conviction could have a detrimental impact on his ability to continue in his role.*
 - *OR (if your case is a traffic case): As a builder, John relies on his vehicle to transport tools and get to and from work sites across Sydney on a daily basis. Any disqualification period imposed by the court would have an onerous impact on John's ability to travel to and from work.*
- If possible, discuss any support or guidance you can give them – for example:
 - *As a close friend of John's, I am committed to offering him any support or guidance that he needs to move past this incident.*
 - *If your referee is your employer, they might say something like: Our company would like to support John through this difficult period and hope that he can continue his employment with us.*
- Ensure the reference is **signed** and **dated**.