

Module 8: Session plan

References and appraisals

Group: _____

Tutor: _____

Location: _____

Aims

- To discuss the purpose of references and the reasons why they may be required.
- To explore how to plan and structure the writing of references.
- To explore the appraisal process as part of the review.
- To identify communication skills appropriate to reviews.

Outcomes

Participants will have:

- discussed the different purposes of references
- an awareness of the appropriate tone and style for different references
- created references using appropriate structure and format
- identified the significant factors in contributing to a positive review
- an understanding of appropriate communication techniques
- modelled a PDP review
- demonstrated an understanding of the review process in relation to KSF.

Activity and time	Tutor activity	Learner activity
Introduction 10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce aims and objectives supported by presentation slides 1-3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask questions as appropriate. SLIr/L2.1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead discussion and ask how many participants have been asked to write a reference. • Discuss the different types of references that can be asked for. Record these on flipchart. • Ask how comfortable participants feel about writing references for people, recording any issues that may arise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to group discussion. SLIr/L2.1 SLd/L2.1 SLd/L2.5

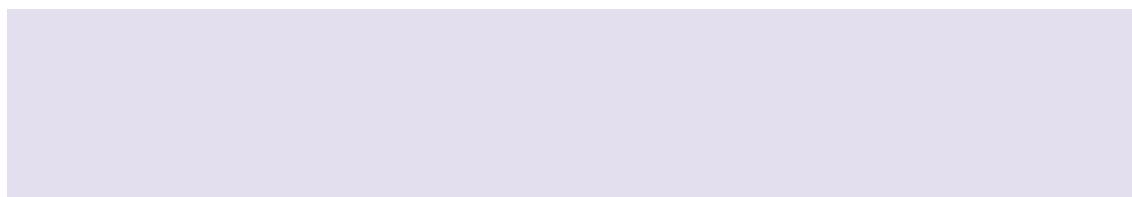
Activity and time	Tutor activity	Learner activity
<p>Character reference 15 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw attention to Activity 1: Writing a reference and read through guidance notes with group. Encourage discussion. • Direct participants to work individually on the task. Each to organise their ideas for a reference. • Take feedback, recording ideas on the flipchart, refer back to the writing process. • Ask that individuals compose a first draft in full. • Support individuals as appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group discussion. • Activity 1 – individual activity – gather ideas for a reference and prepare first draft. • Give feedback. <p>Wt/L2.1,2,3,5,6 Ws/L2.1,2,3,4 Ww/L2.1,2</p>
<p>Using thesaurus 15 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Activity 2 by reminding participants of the value of a thesaurus in choosing vocabulary for references. • Give participants a selection of words commonly used in references eg reliable, honest. These words may be written on a flipchart or on pieces of card distributed amongst the group. • Direct participants, in pairs, to identify alternative words (without use of thesaurus). • Model use of the thesaurus, linking knowledge of adjectives and adverbs to locating appropriate vocabulary. Ask group to consult thesaurus – compare range of vocabulary. It is to be noted that style and tone are important in selecting appropriate vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and respond. • Activity 2 – paired activity – identify alternative words with and without thesaurus. <p>Rw/L2.1,2,3 Rt/L2.6</p>

Activity and time	Tutor activity	Learner activity
<p>Employer reference 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Activity 3: Employer reference supported by Handout 1: Reference warning to employers. • Direct individuals to work alone on this activity, using the available material. Draw attention to Handout 1 and ask participants to consider these guidelines when composing the reference. • Ask participants to share references – draw out key points of similarity. • Refer to structure and organisation of material. • Direct participants to consider use of vocabulary. • Distribute Handout 2: Sample references. Encourage participants to use the handout to evaluate their references. Discuss structures and use of vocabulary. Draw out commonalities/areas for improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 3 – individual activity – complete. • Feed back reference to group. • Read samples, looking for any similar structures, uses of vocabulary etc. <p>Rt/L2.3 Rt/L2.7 Wt/L2.5,6</p>
<p>Appraisals 5 min</p> <p>15 min</p> <p>15 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift focus from references to appraisals – note the link in leadership qualities between writing references and conducting appraisals. Note the importance of effective questioning. • Set Activity 4: Open and closed questions supported by Handout 3: Open and closed questions. • Take feedback. • Lead into Activity 5: Preparing for appraisals and reviews by setting the activity in the context of the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF). • Read through job role and background. Ask participants, in pairs, to identify key factors in relation to job role, cross referencing to KSF guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and respond. • Activity 4 – paired/individual activity – complete set tasks. • Activity 5 – paired activity. • Identify key factors and complete grid. <p>SLd/L2.1 Rt/L2.5,6,7 Wt/L2.6</p>

Resources/aids:

- Module 8 PowerPoint presentation/OHP slides
- Handouts: Reference warning to employers; Sample references; Open and closed questions
- Activity sheets: Writing a reference; Employer reference; Open and closed questions; preparing for appraisals and reviews; Appraisal process start to finish
- dictionaries
- thesaurus
- flip chart
- pieces of card (optional)
- highlighter pens.

Assessment evaluation



Planning

Individual skills developed	Possible management implications	Relevance of activity/resources	Suggested changes

Module 8:

Activity summary sheet

The session aims to consolidate key aspects of skills developed. The focus of the session is on tone and style in writing and how these may influence how a reference may be received. Participants are directed to refer back to 'bias' and 'reading between the lines', drawing on that knowledge to support the activity.

The tutor will lead discussion on some of the legal implications around writing a reference. Trainer will model use of a thesaurus, drawing on key grammar points learned in previous modules.

Introductory discussion – types of references

The purpose of this activity is to focus attention on the different types of references that can be requested and what the implications may be in providing references for individuals. As managers, various references may be requested for staff and it is crucial that a good understanding of the purpose of the reference is clear. Participants are encouraged to discuss how comfortable they feel about submitting a written record of their views about another individual. The discussion is aimed at having participants consider themselves as managers, recognising the legal and social implications of the role and developing strategies for managing change.

Activity 1: Writing a reference

Participants are directed to work alone during this activity. Each must record ideas and organise a draft for a reference using the material offered. The tutor circulates and offers support where needed. On completion of the draft, participants share ideas and issues which are recorded on flipchart. The activity aims to promote objectivity and evidence based commentary, highlighting the importance of evidence to support statements in a character reference.

Tutor models use of thesaurus after activity. Draws attention to use of adjectives and adverbs, the organisation of the thesaurus and how it can support vocabulary development.

Activity 2: Style, tone and vocabulary

The activity offers participants the opportunity to identify a range of alternatives to given words. Use of the thesaurus is discussed and participants are encouraged to use it, comparing the range of vocabulary on offer with own choices. Tutor should note the knowledge of adjectives and adverbs necessary in identifying appropriate choice of words.

Activity 3: Reference type

The activity aims to draw out the key differences in the two reference types. Consideration is given here of the legal implications when providing a reference. Tutor directs participants to consider these and links to use of vocabulary. The role of human resources in the provision of an employer reference is discussed.

Participants are encouraged to compare own reference with those in handout and to identify areas for improvement.

Activity 4: Open and closed questions

The activity encourages an investigation into appropriate use of questioning and notes the importance of effective questioning in a leader, particularly during the review and appraisal process.

Activity 5: Preparing for appraisals and reviews

Shift focus from the written reference to the practical activity of appraisals. Participants are directed to read the notes, recalling the key points from the KSF and how these need to be addressed in the review. Participants are offered the opportunity to identify key factors for review. It is to be noted that participants are to consider communication and the how this can be incorporated into the review process.

Activity 6: Appraisal process start to finish

Working in pairs, participants work through the review process, consider the key factors and map out their approaches to the process.

Feedback is offered to the whole group in order to share practice and develop models and approaches that support staff.

Participants are directed to make full use of the KSF guidelines during the activity.

Summary and evaluation

This enables participants to share concerns and consolidate key information through discussion with colleagues.

Module 8: Activity 1

Writing a reference

Extending writing skills - writing a reference

You may be asked to write a reference for someone. At some point in their career, almost everyone is asked to write some sort of reference, whether it is for an employee, a friend, a student or simply someone you have worked with. It is important that you feel confident that you can write an effective reference. It is equally important that you feel able to say 'no' when you do not feel comfortable recommending someone for a position.

It would not be in a person's best interests if you were to write a reference that was less than positive. A reference that encourages an employer to read between the lines and pick up on what is not being said is potentially more damaging than declining to supply a reference.

If you cannot provide a positive reference, politely decline and allow the employer to seek a reference from someone who might be able to respond positively.

Task

You have been asked to provide a character reference for someone you have known for a long time. Think about someone you know and consider what positive things you would be able to say to a prospective employer.

Write here what you might be able to say in a character reference.

Module 8: Activity 3

Employer reference

You have received a request for a reference for a student who worked on placement with your trust for three months. The request asks for attendance and punctuality details.

You have the following information at your disposal.

Contribution to department limited but got on well with people (supervisor).

Got on ok when here – not the worst we've had.

Great laugh DJ – got on well with everyone.

We had a great time when DJ was here – great laugh on the night out.

Reasonably ok – doesn't rock the boat - does enough to get the job done – no more (Manager).

Not too quick on picking up on the paperwork – talks more than writes (supervisor).

Attendance record:
43/72 working days
19 days off sick
3 days on training course
2 days study leave
5 days holiday
Recorded lates: 27 (HR)

Individual task

- (1) Decide which information you can use.
- (2) Prioritise the information.
- (3) Organise the information.
- (4) Write the reference using standard English and include all necessary information.

Module 8: Handout 1

Reference warning to employers

Most employers will at some stage be asked to provide a reference on a former or current employee. As part of any responsible recruitment strategy most employers will not take on an employee without at least a satisfactory reference. However, many employers are unaware of the potential legal pitfalls that can arise when preparing a reference. Here is a brief guide to consider when preparing an employment reference.

The employee's right to a reference

Generally, a business is under no obligation to provide an ex-employee with a reference. Exceptions to this rule include:

- an express clause in the employee's contract or a compromise agreement (failure to provide one in these circumstances will be a breach of contract)
- certain regulatory bodies insist that their members obtain and provide references (eg LAUTRO)
- although not strictly a reference, if an employee has been continuously employed for one year or more, an employer must within 14 days of a request from the employee provide written reasons for any dismissal.

The employer's duty when preparing a reference

If an employer chooses to provide a reference, the referee has a duty of care to both the employee and the business receiving the reference. The referee must ensure that the reference is not only true and accurate but also fair and reasonable. The reference must not give an unfair or misleading impression overall even if each element is factually correct. Referees should not be 'economical with the truth'. Even if everything said is true, if what is left out would change the reference, it could be negligent!

Post employment discrimination

Further protection is available for workers covered by discrimination legislation. In certain circumstances, failure to provide a reference or the giving of an unjustifiably bad reference can amount to unlawful discrimination, provided that the discrimination arises out of and is closely connected to the employment relationship. Recent cases and amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Race Relations Act 1976 (Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended on 1 October 2004) confirm that discrimination laws can also cover references for ex-employees.

From www.furleypage.co.uk

Module 8: Handout 2

Sample references

Sample response – character reference

I have known _____ for _____ years. She has represented our community in local council meetings and works in a voluntary capacity for Help the Aged. In addition, she runs a small business where she is responsible for printing and editing articles.

_____ is organised, efficient, competent, and has an excellent rapport with people of all ages. Her communication skills, both written and verbal, are excellent.

In summary, I would highly recommend _____ for any position that she may seek to pursue. She will be a valuable asset for any organisation.

Sample response – employer reference

To _____

_____ has worked for _____ as office administration assistant for the past two years. While under my supervision, her responsibilities have included, filing, post collection and distribution, word processing of confidential documents, producing spreadsheets of statistics on a monthly basis, maintenance and ordering of office supplies and dealing with telephone queries.

She has established a very good rapport with managers across the service. Her ability to get work done has been outstanding. Respected by colleagues, _____ is organised, thorough in her paperwork, and is always on time.

_____ has done an excellent job whilst working with _____ and I would highly recommend her for a position with your organisation.

Sample response – supporting someone for a position/training – sometimes known as a letter of endorsement

To whom it may concern:

I would like to recommend _____ as a candidate for training to become a qualified nurse. In her position as Senior Nursing Auxiliary, _____ was employed in _____ from 2000 – 2004. _____ did an excellent job in this position and was an asset to our organisation during the time she was on the unit. She has excellent written and verbal communication skills, is extremely well organised, can work independently and ensures that the job gets done.

_____ was responsible for three other members of staff . These nursing assistants, under _____ supervision, were responsible for much of the day-to-day maintenance of care on the unit.

Module 8: Activity 4

Open and closed questions

Scenario (1)

The receptionist at the local GP surgery is due for a review. You are new in post and have been given the role of reviewing him.

You have not had the opportunity to meet him yet but must have a pre-review meeting to discuss the review process if you are to carry out all the reviews within your remit.

The PCT uses a preset form to send out to people being reviewed to help facilitate discussion.

The receptionist has answered the questions and returned the form.

Pre-review questions
Name of person being reviewed:
(1) How do you think things have gone for you this year? ok
(2) What do you think has gone well for you? I just do the job
(3) What has been your most important achievement this year? Winning the darts championship
(4) What do you think you might be able to improve for the coming year? Don't know
(5) What support/help/training do you think might be useful this year? Don't need any

Task (1)

In pairs, discuss: what the issues are for the reviewer in relation to the responses offered by the person to be reviewed. Decide what sorts of questions might have supported the process. Share these with the group.

Task (2)

Individually, write one question for each section that is designed to gain further information. You may want to consider how these questions can be rephrased in order to gain some objective information. The KSF Review Process will help you with this task.

Module 8: Handout 3

Open and closed questions

These are two types of questions you can use that are very different in character and the ways in which they are used.

Closed questions

Definition

There are two definitions that are used to describe closed questions. A common definition is:

A closed question can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase.

Eg 'How old are you?' and 'Where do you live?' are closed questions.

A more limiting definition is:

A closed question can be answered with either 'yes' or 'no'.

So, 'Are you happy?' is a closed question

Using closed questions

Closed questions have the following characteristics:

- they give you *facts*
- they are easy to answer
- they are quick to answer
- they keep control of the conversation with the questioner.

Closed questions are useful in the following situations:

Use	Example
As opening questions in a conversation, as it makes it easy for the other person to answer, and doesn't force them to reveal too much about themselves.	<i>It's great weather, isn't it? Where do you live? What time is it?</i>
For testing understanding (asking yes/no questions). This is also a great way to break into a long ramble.	<i>What are the qualifications needed for the post of staff nurse?</i>
For gaining positive or negative information depending on how you ask the question. The yes/no responses are encoded into the questions.	<i>Are you happy with your current supplier? Do they give you all that you need? Would you like to find a better supplier?</i>
For achieving closure (seeking yes to the big question).	<i>If I can deliver this tomorrow, will you sign for it now?</i>

You can turn any opinion into a closed question that forces a yes or no by adding tag questions, such as 'isn't it?', 'don't you?' or 'can't they?' to any statement.

The first word of a question sets up the dynamic of the closed question, by signalling the easy answer ahead.

These are words like:

do, would, are, will, if.

Open questions

Definition

An open question can be defined as:

A question that is likely to receive a long answer.

Open questions deliberately seek longer answers, and are the opposite of closed questions.

Using open questions

Open questions have the following characteristics:

- they ask the respondent to think and reflect
- they will give you opinions and feelings
- they hand control of the conversation to the respondent.

This makes open questions useful in the following situations:

Use	Example
As a follow-on from closed questions, to develop a conversation and open up someone who is rather quiet.	<i>What did you do on you holidays? How do you keep focused on your work?</i>
To find out more about a person, their wants, needs, problems, and so on.	<i>What's keeping you so preoccupied these days? Why is that so important to you?</i>
To get people to realise the extent of their problems (to which, of course, you have the solution).	<i>I wonder what would happen if your customers complained even more? Rob Jones used to arrive late everyday. What happened to him?</i>
To get them to feel good about you by asking after their health or otherwise demonstrating human concern about them.	<i>How have you been after your exams? You're looking down. What's up?</i>

Open questions begin with words like:

what, why, how, describe.

Using open questions can be difficult but well-placed questions do leave you in control as you steer the interest of the other person and engage them in the task at hand.

When opening conversations, a good balance is around three closed questions to one open question. The closed questions start the conversation and summarise progress, whilst the open question gets the other person thinking and continuing to give you useful information about them.

Module 8: Activity 5

Preparing for appraisals and reviews

As an employee, you work as part of a team. It is important that you know:

- what your responsibilities are
- what the duties of other team members are
- who you should report to
- what support and training is available to you
- what the mandatory requirements are for your role.

Have a look at the partially completed appraisal document below. In pairs:

- (1) Discuss what the issues are with the information offered.
- (2) Consider how the KSF guidelines might support you in conducting a positive review with this staff member.
- (3) On Mandatory Form 1: Section 2 Recording Development Review Decisions, complete the grid.

Appraisal/review preparation

Skills: Core 1/Level 2 – Communicate with a range of people on a range of matters

OK Don't like leaving messages on answer phones so hang up and call back. I'm not confident talking to relatives. I don't know what to say. The 'phone calls always seem to happen when you're busy doing something so you don't have time to chat with the relatives.

Give information in team meetings and in staff meetings. Listen to people in the team when they are giving information. Get on with most people but I always have a run in with Katie and I know Jenny doesn't get on with her either so the team gets split up.

Worried about writing notes onto the computer. There's too much paperwork and forms.

Don't really use the computer in work much.

Skills: HWB5/Level 1 – Undertake care activities to meet individuals' health and wellbeing needs

Doing OK and I feel I am learning a lot about different mental health problems people have.

I don't know a lot of the right words for some of the problems people have and even if I know the words, I'm not really sure exactly what the condition is. Like Clinical depression – what's that? Is it different from ordinary depression? I need some training about different mental health problems and how to deal with them. I get worried when I work with the older mental patients because they can be aggressive and I'm not sure what to do.

Skills: Core 2/Level 1 – Contribute to own personal development

I do need more training. Isn't there a short course I can go on to help me learn about different disorders? Need to finish NVQ – haven't got evidence in my file and I've been deferred once.

I'd like to go on a computer course so I can get emails at work.

Skills: Core 5/Level 1 – Maintain the quality of own work

I'm always punctual and reliable and I will stay behind if there's something that needs to be done. I haven't been off sick. I know about health and safety because I did the training.

Module 8: Activity 6

Appraisal process start to finish

Task

Work in pairs to carry out the review for Sara Brown. Use the information below to identify key points and then answer questions (1) – (5) as directed.

Sara is clerical support. She works two days on the ward as a ward clerk and three days as clerical support for the unit manager.

Grade Band 2

JOB ROLE

To provide administrative and secretarial support to the unit manager.

To provide administrative support to the care team on the ward.

Sara has good computer skills and has a CLAIT qualification. She has an office administration background and is efficient in dealing with paperwork. She has good organisational skills and communicates effectively both over the telephone and face to face. She supports the care team in preparing notes for care team meetings and attends ward based training when possible. Sara has 'A' levels in maths, physics and biology. She often supports the nurse in charge with the duties rota.

Agreed development: To take Spanish GCSE, to take database training, to research possibility of going to college to take a degree.

You have the following background information about Sara.

Background

Sara is the oldest child from a family of four, all of whom still live in Essex. She has good links with her family but stayed in the north with her partner. She enjoys pursuing academic study and had excellent grades in 'A' levels in maths, biology and physics. She wanted to go into medicine but had a child when she was 18 and could not afford to go at that time. She is taking a GCSE in Spanish this year with the local college.

She is sociable and generally gets on well with people but she can be dismissive of those who she perceives as lacking in education and she has, on at least two occasions, been openly critical and joked about a member of staff who struggles with spelling and writing up patient notes. She has been reported for this behaviour and the nurse in charge of the shift spoke to her about her 'joking'. She does not appear to have respect for a number of the people she works alongside who she has been heard to describe recently as 'dullards'. She is more than competent in her role but isn't particularly happy in her current position.

Module 8: Activity 6

Appraisal process start to finish

Sara has been gathering evidence for her review.

(1) Communication	Patient notes for care team meetings. Presentation of health and safety audit to ward.
(2) Personal and people development	Attended training session on advanced databases – PDP updated. Gained A* GCSE Spanish.
(3) Health, safety and security	Completed H&S training. H&S rep for unit.
(4) Service improvement	Entered all patients' information onto electronic format. Set up mailing lists for care teams.
(5) Quality	Carried out H&S audit on ward.
(6) Equality and diversity	Attended Diversity Day training.

- (1) Plan how you are going to conduct the review. You need to consider whether there might be any problems and identify ways in which you might be able to resolve these.
- (2) Decide what questions you might like to ask Sara in relation to her review. Record these.
- (3) What other information would you like to see? List this.
- (4) How are you going to address the 'joking' issue? You need to plan how you are to tackle this. Write this down and feed back to the whole group.
- (5) During the review, support Sara in identifying three learning objectives for the next year. Use the KSF documentation to support you.