

THE RHODES SCHOLARSHIP FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA: 2027

Covering South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)

GUIDANCE FOR REFEREES

References must be written in English and must be submitted before 23:59 SAST, 17 August 2026.

Thank you for your willingness to serve as a referee for an applicant for the Rhodes Scholarship. References form a crucial part of the selection process, and your reference could make the difference to an applicant's success. The following notes are intended to serve as a guide as you write your reference.

Rhodes Scholarship references are confidential and you should not share them with applicants. The reference should be in your own words (i.e. not drafted by anyone else). References must be written in English and your comments should not exceed two A4 or letter-size pages (minimum 10 point type).

About the Rhodes Scholarship

The Rhodes Scholarship programme is the oldest (established 1902), and perhaps the most prestigious, international scholarship in the world. For more background information on the Scholarship, please see [our website](#).

The [selection criteria for the scholarship](#) are as follows:

- **Academic excellence:** the University of Oxford is one of the most competitive graduate environments in the world and applicants must, at minimum, meet the entry requirements of their chosen course. Most successful applicants will exceed these minimums. (candidates will have a greater chance of successful admission if they have a First Class Honours or GPA of 3.70/4.00 or higher, or equivalent).
- **Energy to use their talents to the full:** as demonstrated by success in areas such as sports, music, debate, dance, theatre, and artistic pursuits, including where teamwork is involved
- **The Virtues:** truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness and fellowship.
- **Moral force of character and instincts to lead,** and to take an interest in their fellow human beings.

Applicants are asked to seek both character and academic references – further guidance is provided below for each type. The reference form will clarify which type of reference you have been asked to submit. **Please note that Rhodes Scholarship referees should not normally be personal friends, peers or relatives, or have any other conflict of interest. If a referee fits into one of these categories, they should make the connection clear within the reference.**

For both academic and character referees:

- Include a brief introduction to yourself, your role and your relationship to the applicant. You may also note any connection you may have to the Rhodes Trust, Rhodes Scholars, or the University of Oxford, although such connections are certainly not required.
- Rhodes Selectors are interested in how you might expect this candidate to develop. We do not expect candidates to be the 'finished product' and would like to hear how you feel they can grow.
- We are interested to hear what *you* can tell us about the candidate that we might not have seen from their CV/transcript/other application materials, which reflects the [qualities of a Rhodes Scholar](#).
- You should think about what is the most important thing you think we should know about the candidate.

Academic referees:

If you know the candidate primarily in an academic capacity, you should concentrate on their academic quality and potential, although your assessment of their other qualities will be welcomed. **If the applicant is successful, your reference may be re-used by Oxford departments and colleges for determining the**

applicant's academic case for admission. A detailed evaluation of their qualifications is therefore very important. The reference form will ask you the following questions:

- a. What is the applicant's relative academic standing in comparison with other students on the same course at the same institution – e.g. top 1%, 3%, 5%, 10%, 25%?
- b. How many students are in the applicant's year group on their programme of study, i.e. with how many students are you comparing the applicant?
- c. On what basis are you making the assessment - personal assessment/official class rank?

We recommend you use the following points to guide the content of the reference:

- Proven academic excellence is the primary criterion for this Scholarship. Please comment in detail on the candidate's academic qualifications, intellectual ability, attitude toward learning, and overall suitability for postgraduate study at the University of Oxford. We would appreciate any insights you can offer that might enhance the Committee's understanding of the candidate's academic transcript, CV, and academic statement.
- Describe the candidate's motivation for and interest in their chosen subject area or field. We welcome your reflections on both their general engagement with the field and, if applicable, the suitability and thoughtfulness of their specific course choices. If relevant, describe the candidate's potential for sustained, independent research (particularly for DPhil/PhD applicants), their ability to work collaboratively with peers, and any relevant professional experience that supports their application.

Character referees:

If you know the applicant through non-academic activities, your reference should focus on character and personal qualities, in the knowledge that the Committee is looking for scholars who show promise of outstanding leadership and achievement in later life. Please offer examples of how the candidate meets our [selection criteria](#), in particular:

- **Energy to use their talents to the full:** Describe how the candidate demonstrates exceptional energy and commitment in developing their talents to the highest level, particularly outside of an academic setting.
- **The virtues:** Illustrate how the candidate lives out their values in daily life. We are looking for examples of integrity, compassion, and an unselfish commitment to others. This may be demonstrated through activities such as community volunteering, mentoring, caregiving responsibilities at home, or leading charitable initiatives.
- **Moral force of character and instincts to lead:** We are looking for individuals who not only act on their convictions but also inspire and motivate others. Leadership may be demonstrated through standing up for their own or others' beliefs, or through ways they have shaped and uplifted communities around them.

Submitting Your Reference:

- When an applicant has registered your details in the application form, you will receive an auto-generated email containing a link to an online reference form to complete, including a place to upload your letter.
- Address your letter to the Rhodes Scholarship Selection Committee.
- Submit your letter on **the letterhead of your academic institution, signed, and in PDF format**. If you are unable to access an official/institutional letterhead we can accept references on a personal letterhead that clearly states your institutional affiliation and provides official contact information (email address and phone number).
- Wherever possible you should give an institutional/professional email address for further contact, this is important for reference verification

- All references should be submitted via the online reference form.
- Once you submit your form, both you and the applicant will receive an automated confirmation email. The applicant will not be able to view the contents of your reference. You may be contacted for further information during the selection process.

References must be written in English and must be uploaded before 23:59 SAST, 17 August 2026. If you require any further support in submitting your reference, email: scholarship.queries@rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk