

How to Write a Winning Nomination Letter

Tell a story

A nomination letter is a narrative. Think about how you can tell the story of an applicant's successes and how to best organize that narrative beyond listing accomplishments or organizing the letter chronologically. Ask yourself: what is the story I want to tell? How can I best tell that story? What is the narrative arc? What are the underlying themes and ideas that I want to touch on? Often, following a chronological narrative buries your claims about an applicant's potential.

Impact, Impact, Impact

Describe the impact and/or future impact of a nominee's contributions. Think about how to best emphasize the potential of a candidate, as well as their research in relation to their influence or potential influence on others (students, peers, researchers, local or university community, and/or more broadly a field of study or industry).

Note Differences

Committees want to know what sets an applicant apart. The majority of applicants will be active researchers and/or teachers. Productivity alone is unlikely to win awards. So, what makes the applicant different? It can be helpful to consider how the applicant's work is *unusual* or *exceptional* and in what way.

Measurable Impacts

If you want to emphasize scholarly impact and/or productivity, concisely indicate the number of publications and/or citation factor of a faculty member, but do not list publications. Listing publications doesn't offer evidence of impact. However, you might highlight articles that have won awards, the placement of an article in a top-ranked journal, the author's citation index, or accolades for a given publication.

Know Your Audience

Emphasize the candidate's contributions in ways that are clear to those who do not actively work on a specific application/theory/idea. While an awards committee may be well versed in a general field, they are likely unfamiliar with the particularities of the candidate's expertise. Therefore, it is important to always make your narrative accessible to a broader audience. Whenever possible, research the review committee. This can help you get a better idea of your audience.

Review Website

Review the criteria outlined on the application website. Make sure to explicitly address how the applicant meets these criteria. If you are unfamiliar with an award, it can be helpful to search for keywords that are used on the website to gauge the importance of certain qualities over others. These are the qualities you want to highlight.

Avoid Repetition and Lists

Most application or nomination packets require a cv. Therefore, do not spend time listing the candidate's accomplishments or publications. Reference to a publication does not provide evidence of scholarly impact. Instead, highlight and describe the significance of a publication. Why is the publication significant? For whom? In relation to what? Does the publication allow for a new area of research or a new line of inquiry? Your letter of support should go beyond listing achievements that already appear on the cv. The letter is an opportunity to provide in-depth information that cannot appear on a cv and is in the service of supporting a larger narrative about the candidate.

Provide Examples

Rather than a statement that a candidate is exceptional, provide clear examples of *how* the candidate is exceptional. One way to do so is by providing specific examples of tangible and impactful achievements. (i.e. rather than claiming that a faculty member is a strong mentor, you might highlight what their students have accomplished thanks to the faculty member's mentoring).

Demonstrate Well-roundedness

Highlight multiple aspects of the applicant's profile, including: professional specialization, key accomplishments/awards, significant professional memberships/activities, insights on effective teaching, and other noteworthy accomplishments. This shows that a candidate is well-rounded. Given the award criteria, consider what is most important to emphasize about a candidate.

Highlight a Scholar's Impact on a Larger Community

It bears repeating that when considering how to best highlight a scholar's impact, it is useful to not only focus on productivity but how the applicant's work impacts others. Consider addressing the following: leadership roles, impact of inventions/discoveries/theories on other scholars or on the field in general (offer proof of that), contribution to education/students, and service to one's community.