

Writing an application for a teaching citation or award

Winning a teaching excellence award is part art, part science, and part pure luck. I can only assist with the first two!

Seven short tips:

1. Ensure familiarity with the guidelines for the award you are applying for. You can find these via the CEI web site. Please note that we have had applicants in the past who have been unsuccessful because the guidelines were not followed closely enough.
2. Consider liaison with past award winners for advice and support with your application.
3. In the application:
 - a) Set your context.
 - It helps the reader if you set the context for your story (including discipline and student cohort) at the beginning, before you elaborate on your particular contribution.
 - See also point 5 below about narrative.
 - b) Make the claim.
 - Identify distinctive or outstanding contributions to student learning, not just ‘good practice’.
 - c) Describe it.
 - When providing your description, it is important to address the criteria, whether it is approaches to student learning, curriculum design, assessment, innovations in teaching, or scholarly research in learning and teaching
 - Be sure to highlight the particular strengths of your claim.
 - Give an example to take the reader “inside” what you’re describing.
 - d) Evidence it
 - Present evidence of teaching effectiveness in relation to student learning (experience and outcomes) – an award for excellence in teaching is more about them than you.
 - Be sure the evidence demonstrates sustained excellence (refer to the guidelines as this can be 2 years, 3 years, or 5 years depending on the award).
 - SELT data: you must provide an interpretation of your tabulated data for the panel. As a rule of thumb, you should present SELT scores above the Faculty or School median because it’s much harder to argue for your teaching excellence when this is not the case.
 - Don’t rely only on SELT. Broaden the evidence base. e.g. consider PORT, student testimonials, outcome data, peer acclaim ...
4. The application should be scholarly (i.e. make use of relevant published literature drawn from the discipline of learning and teaching, not only your substantive discipline as the applicant)
5. The application will be stronger if it has a narrative.

One strategy involves starting with some statements about yourself, your teaching philosophy, what drives you, your passion – and then repeatedly referring back to this as you illustrate the

details of your claims to excellence. This shows that your excellence was no accident – it was part of a deliberate strategy underpinned by your values. It inserts the “you” into what could otherwise be a dry or dispassionate account.

6. Start writing the application early. Good applications take time to craft. And ... your referees will want time to read a near final draft when composing their reports.
7. Iteratively access and use peer review. CEI can provide some support.
8. Do not under any circumstance breach the formatting requirements. Keep your document readable – the temptation to simply pack more in can lead you to lose white space on the page. Resist this. The panel reading your application will be grateful for an application that is beautifully presented.

FAQs

Should applications be in the first person?

I think that you should write in the first person. The reasoning is that I think it is advantageous to your chances if the reader can discern the personal passion that you bring to what you do - and be infected by it. I think that to do this means speaking from the heart (as well as the head) and therefore you need the first person.

I also think that readers of this kind of document are likely to be easily tired of reading them unless they are in some way able to say “ah-ha! ... so *that’s* what it is that drives you!” And “I see how this has played out”. There is personal interest story there as a sub-text. I think everyone does what they do for some deep passionate reason. If that’s apparent, then so much the better.