

Working towards a template of award letters

General letter format:

Letters must be specific to the award/scholarship to which they are applying and should not be completely “recycled” from past award packages, even if they were submitted for the same kind of award.

1. Letters must be on institutional letterhead and signed by the writer(s).
2. Letters should be 1-2 pages long and must address the criteria for the award/scholarship.
3. Paragraph 1:
 - a. Specifically restate goals of award (subsequent paragraphs should be organized around those goals)
 - b. Outline your qualifications to write this letter
4. Writers should be specific about how the candidate meets the eligibility requirements and the criteria for an award/scholarship, using examples of (the candidate's) work whenever possible. Often, a scoring rubric is included with an award/scholarship category. Letters should ideally address each of these areas specifically with examples of how a candidate exemplifies outstanding work.

Example #1 of a general statement:

• *I thoroughly enjoy working with XXXX and have come to know her as a truly valuable asset to our team. She is honest, dependable, and incredibly hard working.*

Example #2 of specific statement:

• *XXXX has made strategic and systemic changes that have and will help us serve our students better. She has contributed in fundamental ways to broader conversations about such topics as assessment, strategic planning, teambuilding, and the dynamic ways in which these all, potentially, become braided together to the benefit of both individuals and communities on and off campus.*

5. Include both qualitative and quantitative examples of a candidate's qualities whenever possible.

Think of this as #s (papers, grants, committees, mentees, evaluation scores—anything countable) and something personal about the proposed awardee.

- a. Give this a “punch” by setting the stage for the impact of this work on the field: for example, outline what top journals they have published in or maybe include their H-index (if that is applicable for their field or applicant). The point is to include something quantitative that highlights the individual's impact.
 - b. This could also be via highlighting an overarching theme to the impact of their body of work
 - c. As an alternative to H-index try (<https://expertscape.com/>) which ranks leaders within a field. It allows you to compare the individual to their given field.
6. Provide evidence of outstanding work that goes above and beyond the average expectations included within a nominee's job description. *How are they specifically exceeding expectations?* Refer to the specifics of the award and also to previous lists of awardees to get a sense of who has been awarded this particular award in the past.

- a. Consider calling out the applicants unique qualifications that have been underrecognized for the given award. For example: “This is a great opportunity for the committee to consider a “women” for this award” (GOOD FOR WOMEN AND/OR URM ETC. NOMINEE’S). Provide specific examples of how a candidate meets those values when going above and beyond in their work. This is especially helpful to reviewers in the Outstanding Mentor Award categories. If possible, also distinguish this candidate from past awardees.
- b. Nominators/Applicants compile all the letters needed and follow the instructions for submissions to the awards portal based on the category. Therefore, supporters should feel confident sharing their letter openly with a nominator or applicant. In fact, it can be helpful to ask the nominee (if they know they are being nominated) to supply quantitative data or examples of “above and beyond” kinds of activities which add extra merit to their nomination.

7. Avoiding Bias

- a. Be agentic in your descriptions—particularly for women. Women tend to write about themselves communally (we, us, together) and do not get awarded for it. Sadly, we get awarded for “I” accomplishments as leaders, not as team members. Here are some examples that depict the difference in language:

Reinforcing Stereotypes	
Communal Words	Agentic Words
Affectionate	Confident
Helpful	Aggressive
Kind	Ambitious
Sympathetic	Dominant
Nurturing	Forceful
Tactful	Independent
Agreeable	Daring
	Outspoken
	Intellectual
Communal Behaviors	Agentic Behaviors
Helping others	Speaking Assertively
Taking direction well	Influencing Others
Maintaining relationships	Initiating Tasks

- b. How to avoid bias? The first step is to recognize that everyone has bias. It is unavoidable, even toward ourselves when drafting our own letters of recommendation. Being cognizant of this will go a long way to ensuring you do not include bias or loaded words in your letter. There are excellent resources available online for specific types of bias and how to avoid them. Some examples are detailed below.
 - i. Gender bias: [This resource from the University of Arizona](#) Commission on the Status for Women has a lot of good advice that should help with all biases but is specifically geared toward gender bias (I have seen versions of this modified with the same general advice for racial bias).

1. In general, mention achievements relevant to the award (e.g., publications, research), recognize accomplishments not effort, avoid communal words mentioned above, keep it professional (letters for women are 7x more likely to mention personal life!), make strong assurances (letters for women are 2.5x more likely to say she 'can do the job' rather than 'she is the best candidate for the job').
- ii. Racial or cultural bias: in general, the advice here is similar for gender bias.
 1. Stay focused on accomplishments, make strong assurances
 2. Avoid making conditional statements: e.g., "for someone of X background, they have made great progress."
 3. Some awards are specifically for people of marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. In this case, specific reference to this is warranted, but should be done so with care.

8. General:

- a. Topic sentences should be used that are just as effective as in a research proposal. Then support with your evidence.
- b. If you are asking for the letter, provide all needs that may be requested by the writer (Award description and criteria, your CV, a list of the accomplishments that may not be evident from your CV and that will help to personalize the letter).
 - i. It's not bragging if it's true!
 - ii. Not just what you've done but the impact on the field is what's important-often undersold.
- c. As the writer, convey warmth, caring and personal regard whenever possible. Be stronger than you think you should be. Use superlatives. No one gets an award for being slightly above average.
 - i. Focus on the body of work by the individual-big picture impact of what they have done.
 - ii. "Courageous" is a great word for dogma-challenging work!

9. Who should you ask to write your letters?

Date

Awards committee to which nomination is being sent
Society Name

Salutation, (e.g., Dear...)

I/We are writing this letter in *superlative* (e.g., strongest, highest possible, etc.) support of [Name} for the {Name of award from the Society that gives it} WHICH IS OFFERED TO CELEBRATE XYZ. ELIGIBILITY. I/We and [state your rank, institution here and if you want to brag a bit, do it here] and I/we know [Name} through... [state how you know the person and for how long; to demonstrate you actually know the person well enough to recommend them] and thus have deep knowledge and appreciation of [Name} eligibility for this award. QUALIFICATIONS AS A LETTER WRITER.

[Name} is....[list the general characteristics and accomplishments of the individual that meet the criteria for this award]. You can include statements like: This award is given to the individual who.....list the general criteria that is printed in the announcement.

Go into **detail** regarding both quantitative and qualitative accomplishments of the individual (some level of detail is important). If possible, include a personal anecdote here that exemplifies why the person is the best person for this award. Explain how what this person has accomplished contributes in a significant way to the institution, the profession, the society and the globe. Point out the reach of this person's accomplishment (regional, national, global). Don't forget to include service to the institution, profession and the public here. You can include a personal note here [*On a personal note....*] Be as warm as is reasonable.

Accolades from other individuals can go here. Mentees, collaborators, etc. e.g., *What others say about [Name} includes...."quotes from others."* (you can solicit these if you have enough time and attribute to the person who says it, with their permission). This conveys knowledge and illustrates personal regard.

Closing—restate why you are nominating this person. Put more superlatives here. E.g., *[Name} is highly deserving of the Award Name here for his/her accomplishment and dedication to XXXXX. Honoring [Name} with this award will reflect well on [Name}'s accomplishments but also on the Society as he/she is of the highest caliber....*

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Credentials here