

10 tips for writing a great award entry

by Jane Melross, Principal Consultant, The Write Solution

While a great initiative is the key to winning an award, making sure you present your entry in the best possible light is critical. By following these tips, you'll be on your way to writing a winning entry in your next awards.

1. Start as soon as you can

Writing an award entry nearly always takes longer than you think. There may also be information that you need to get from others (such as statistics or financial information). Your boss (and even their boss) may need to approve the entry. You may also be working with others inside or outside your organisation so you need to allow time for them to make contributions.

A simple timeline will help you keep on top of when things need to happen. Remember, most awards are non-negotiable with their deadlines.

2. Address the criteria

Nearly all awards will have evaluation criteria they will use to assess your entry. For your entry to even be considered, the judges will check everything you say against these criteria. You need to tell the judges exactly how your entry demonstrates that it meets each criterion. It is best to be really direct in this, eg *Our widget machine demonstrates innovation because it*

You also need to make sure you address *every* aspect of each evaluation criterion. For example, if a criterion asks you to "Tell us how your initiative contributes to local, state and national tourism", note that this criterion is asking you to talk to the judges about *three* aspects of your initiative – local, state and national.

3. Make it easy for the judges

Imagining yourself in the judges' shoes can help you structure your entry. Usually judges will review dozens of submissions and will often have a checklist of information they are looking for. Your job is to make it easy for them to give you as many ticks as possible on that checklist. More ticks usually mean a higher score.

The judges' checklist will mirror the information you were given to describe the evaluation process used on your initiative.

Things you can do include:

- Re-state each evaluation criterion as a heading and address each element of that criterion in your answer so it's clear what you're talking about.
- Be very direct in your language so the judges can easily see that you have addressed each element of the evaluation criteria.
- Be concise. While it's important to give the judges the information they need, it's also important not to overwhelm them with superfluous information or make them sort through lots of information and interpret what it means in relation to the evaluation criteria.
- Be very precise about where supporting information can be found (for example, *An example of our accident and incident report can be found at Appendix B; or The table at Figure 2 demonstrates the increase in our occupancy figures*).

4. The power of a bullet point

If several important points need to be made, structuring them with bullet points can make them easier to read than squashing them all into a paragraph. The section above (*Make it easy for the judges*) illustrates the effective use of bullet points.

5. Stick to the word limit

Many awards enforce a word limit or page limit. Don't be tempted to ignore this as the extra information you provide may be ignored. You may even be penalised for breaking the word limit. Judges have to read a lot of entries so while you may feel you have more to say, keeping to the word limit is wise.

6. Be wary of appendices

Providing information in an appendix can be a great way to give the judges additional information that brings your entry to life (particularly if there is a word or page limit). But beware, some awards don't allow appendices, so be sure to check the conditions of entry.

If appendices are allowed, don't overwhelm the judges with pages and pages of additional information. Carefully choose information that supports what you have said in the body of the entry and refer to the appendix specifically. For example, you might say "*We have developed a checklist that staff are required to complete before they commence work. A copy is provided at Appendix C.*"

Appendices are for supporting information that provides *additional* light on your entry: you can't assume the judges will read them.

7. Check your formatting

Making your entry easy to read with bold headings and bullet points makes it easier for the judges to read and digest. While you're not being assessed on the presentation of your entry (unless it's for graphic design awards!), this will help the judges to see that all the information they need is included.

8. Check it (and then check it again!)

When you're the one writing a submission, it can be hard to clearly assess the final product. Have a break and then read it again, double-checking that you have addressed all the evaluation criteria. You should always get someone else to check it too. You may even ask more than one other person. For example, there might be someone who is great at checking for typos and someone else who will be better at knowing if you have got everything across clearly.

9. Make sure you've included everything that was asked for

Many awards include a checklist of what you need to include before submitting your entry. Before you lick the stamp or press the send button, double check that you have included everything that was asked for.

10. If you don't win, try again

Keeping a smile on your face on awards night if you don't win can be difficult after all the work you've put in (think Logie Awards!). The reasons for not winning can vary. It may be that there was a record number of entries that year, or someone else better explained why their entry was innovative or you still might need time to demonstrate how effective your initiative is. Some awards offer feedback and this can provide useful insights for next time. If there is no possibility of feedback, have a look at the organisations that won and try to objectively see what might have made their entry better than yours this year – and learn from it for next time.



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Jane was in charge of the high profile, award-winning Workplace Safe campaign with the Tasmanian Government for eleven years. She managed the WorkCover Safety Awards from their inception in 1996 and was a founding member of the national committee that initiated the Safe Work Australia Awards. Prior to this Jane worked in television production and the casino industry in Tasmania and South Australia.

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