

STRONG, SUPPORTIVE TEXT FOR COVER LETTERS OF AWARDS.
Compiled by Sarah L. Keller for the College of Arts and Sciences, April 2014

Challenge: *In order for a faculty member to win a national award, her/his nominators must write fantastic nomination letters. Below are examples of text that you might find appropriate to insert in your own cover letters of recommendation to help your candidate look exceptionally strong:*

Candidate's existing work at UW and previous work elsewhere is great:

- “Candidate stands out compared to other highly qualified applicants”
- “Academic credentials are outstanding”
- “Command of the literature and understanding of complex systems of X is second to none”
- “Highly productive”
- “One of the most creative and productive researchers I know”
- “Work is highly creative, technically deep, and likely to have enormous practical impact”
- “Project ideas show her/his originality and ability to conduct creative independent research”
- “Working at the cutting edge of the field”
- “Already made several seminal contributions to the field”
- “Basic research on a new form of X, which she/he helped discover”
- “Research is ‘game-changing’”
- “Pioneering work has been recognized through invitations to speak at national conferences”
- “Postdoctoral training was extremely successful, resulting in well-cited publications in top-tier journals”
- “Paper has been cited over X times, and work overall cited over Y times, an amazing record of high impact work for an assistant professor”
- “Received highly-competitive grant/award”
- “Garnered prestigious award, which speaks to the community’s enthusiasm for Candidate’s approach in solving critical problems”
- “Candidate is recognized by the science community, as evidenced by her/his award of the prestigious BigAward”
- “Candidate was selected as a finalist for BigAward, which is a high honor and strong evidence of her/his growing national reputation”
- “Obtained coveted award, demonstrating national recognition and path toward independence”
- “Developed multi-faceted and cutting-edge research program”
- “Developed novel and innovative treatments”
- “Developed unique and powerful method”
- “Previous studies open the door for development of new therapies”
- “Made what is considered by many to be a breakthrough discovery”
- “Seminal discovery”
- “Recognized as one of top scientific advances by editors of Journal X”
- “Candidate’s research caused a re-evaluation in the field X, which is striking because Candidate conducted all her/his research in a lab that had no expertise in X, demonstrating Candidate’s resourcefulness and ability to think independently.”
- “This current proposal is novel and potentially paradigm shifting”
- “Candidate and her/his team address a major challenge in X”
- “Currently proposed thoughtful experiments are truly innovative and will have strong impact”

“Candidate has a strong passion to challenge existing paradigms in Field X”

“Candidate was a highly sought after recruit”

Candidate has been quick out of the gate at UW:

“Impact on our program has already been extremely high”

“Has had tremendous success in establishing her/his independent research program”

“Has started a vigorous and promising research program”

“Candidate’s lab is already well established and staffed with post-doctoral researchers and graduate students attracted to her/his cutting-edge research”

“Her/his first-author publications already rank Candidate ahead of our other assistant professors and well placed among our associate professors”

“In the X months since arriving, Candidate has laid the foundation for extending her/his results”

“Less than X months into her/his first independent academic appointment here at UW, she/he has assembled a laboratory to execute a challenging research program.”

“She/he has already recruited an excellent team of X graduate students and Y undergraduates.”

“Candidate has quickly established her/himself as an early-career leader in the emerging field”

“Demonstrated remarkable productivity, overwhelmingly justifying our confidence in Candidate when we hired her/him”

“Awarded FancyMassiveGrant on her/his first submission”

Candidate will go far:

“Has a tremendous future”

“Is a rising star”

“Is on a super-star trajectory”

“I am convinced that Candidate is on a trajectory to make major contributions in Field X”

“Candidate’s work will break new ground”

“Excellent research momentum and scientific potential”

“I have full confidence the Candidate will become an outstanding career scientist and develop a research program of the highest quality and productivity”

“Famous Person X says he/she expects Candidate to make major contributions to the field”

“Is leading the way”

“I have known many junior faculty in the X years that I have been at UW, and I rank Candidate at the top in her/his potential to be a leader in her/his field.

Candidate brings together two or more fields:

“Work is highly creative, and demonstrates deep thinking at the intersection of X and Y”

“Work at the nexus of X and Y”

Department is great:

“As Chair, I will ensure Candidate has encouragement and resources necessary for her/his success”

“Candidate [is great because] takes full advantage of the outstanding research environment at UW”

“At UW, she/he has all resources, including colleagues, to continue her/his trajectory as a high impact scholar”

“Our department and UW as a whole is committed to supporting Dr. X’s innovative research. We have already renovated a X square-foot lab space and equipped it to meet the specific needs of Dr. X’s cross-disciplinary research.

“Candidate will leverage several state-of-the-art equipment core facilities at UW, particularly the...”

“We are thrilled that Candidate is pursuing her/his research in our outstanding environment”

Candidate will be even greater if granted the award:

“With the award, she/he will bring new tools of X to bear on Y”

“With the award, she/he will advance the design of X through sophisticated control of Y”

“The award will catalyze Dr. X’s research to develop unconventional methods and will lay the groundwork for subsequent major research initiatives in this exciting new field.”

In closing:

“Ideal candidate for this award”

“Is a magnificent choice to represent the UW for this award”

“Outstanding candidate/nominee for this award”

“Exceptionally well qualified for this award”

“Candidate will make a great Award Fellow”

“Candidate is well-positioned to be the next [famous award winner]”

PLEASE REMIND YOUR FACULTY:

Awards to UW faculty usually occur because an individual faculty member has the bravery to find out about an award, and then to ask someone to nominate him/her. New faculty often don’t know this and simply wait to be nominated. **Please explicitly outline any self-nomination procedures in your department to your new faculty.**

WARNING! AVOID THE FOLLOWING:

1) Don’t use conditional tense. Don’t say your “candidate would stand a strong chance of succeeding” (This reads “... if only he/she were good...”) Don’t say “If this research is successful”. We don’t want a nominee who merely has a chance, we want someone who is great.

2) Don’t emphasize how nice your female candidate is. For a research award, do not mention exemplary service or teaching unless it is directly relevant to research. If you really cannot help yourself, talk about her nice qualities at the end of your letter, not before you describe her outstanding, seminal research contributions. For example, don’t lead with “Candidate never puts on airs”, which reads as “she doesn’t pretend that she’s better than she is (which isn’t very good)”.

3) Letter writers regularly fail to use appropriate superlative and active words for females. This is a national problem, with serious data to back it up. For data on the lack of superlatives, even for women who were hired in chemistry and biochemistry departments (and so are presumably impressive), see T. Schmader et al. “A Linguistic Comparison of Letters of Recommendation for Male and Female Chemistry and Biochemistry Job Applicants” *Sex Roles* (2007) 57: 509-514. Data “demonstrating that female applicants were more likely to be described with communal terms (e.g., *affectionate, warm, kind, and nurturing*)” or via their relationships to others (*student, child, relative, and mother*), that these “female” terms are anti-correlated to perceptions of a candidate’s hireability, and that female applicants are not likely to be described with agentic terms (e.g., *ambitious, dominant, and self-confident*), see J.M. Madera et al. “Gender and letters of recommendation for academia...” *J. Applied Psychology* (2009) 94:1591-1599.

In short, re-read your letter and pretend you are writing for a male colleague. Consider inserting some superlative words into your letter: (e.g. *outstanding, excellent, exceptional, best, top, superb, first-rate, brilliant, superlative, first-class, seminal, tremendous*) as well as some “agentic” terms that indicate independence (e.g., *confident, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, daring, outspoken, intellectual, active, dynamic, achieve, gain, insight, think*).