

2025 AAUT: NOMINATION WRITING TIPS

Suggestions from assessors and award committees (2023-2024) for writing a successful nomination:

PREPARING YOUR NOMINATION

Start early and plan for impact

- Start early - very early! Have a plan for your initiatives and be prepared to justify and evaluate them. This shows that you're on a journey to improve learning and the student experience.
- Plan ahead and collect evidence. It often takes years to become an "overnight success." Your evidence is incredibly critical to the success of your nomination. Plan your evaluation program with systematic data collection so you can provide strong evidence for the impact of your work. This will tell a better story and support the evolution of your initiatives.

Reflect and evaluate continuously

- Treat a teaching innovation as a piece of experimental research. Plan the evaluation before starting and try to gather hard evidence, not just student comments. Be aware of L&T innovations in your field before reinventing the wheel.
- Continually reflect on your teaching practice and evaluate your work methodically, regularly and comprehensively.
- Evaluate new initiatives from the first iteration and track results, as well as how you address feedback. Ask yourself how you will know the impact of what you've done and determine how you will proactively evaluate from the outset, so that you have three years of evidence and development by the time you apply for an award.

Use the resources, seek mentoring and share practice

- Carefully read the AAUT resources available and leverage experienced AAUT networks at your institution or on the AAUT-Network website. Many mentors are past award winners and experienced Assessors who have gone through the process before and will have valuable wisdom to share.
- Share your practice outside your discipline – national and international sharing is needed for these national awards.
- Utilise peer review of your work wherever you can - and don't limit this to just observation of classroom teaching. E.g. Peer review of assessment materials (instructions, rubrics, etc.) or learning resources and activities can help form your evidence base for part of your narrative. Even a negative comment in a peer review can become a powerful story if you can show what you did in response, how you evaluated the impact of the change you made and then refined moving forward, perhaps with a follow-up peer review and/or specific evaluations from students.
- Ground your practice in theory
- Make sure you use scholarly references to inform the initiative instead of using references to simply support

or explain the initiative - assessors want to see the journey as well as the outcomes.

- Be clear in your teaching philosophy - make sure that your innovations are evidenced-based and tethered to key scholarly literature.

Understand the award type and tailor your nomination

- Think carefully about the award that you are nominating for - do you have enough material for a Teaching Award or just a Citation at this stage?
- These applications are not SFEA applications - avoid cut and pasting - it is a very different process and requirement.

Seek feedback and be patient

- AAUT applications are a big step up from most institutional applications and you'll probably need multiple rounds of redrafting, feedback and refining before your application is polished and ready to submit. This will take time and will benefit from feedback from multiple sources.
- Seek feedback from your institution and others who understand the AAUT process/requirements. It may take a few years to prepare and submit a successful submission, so be patient and treat it as a long-term project - good luck!

WRITING YOUR NOMINATION

Tell a coherent and compelling story

- Tell a story: the problem you were solving and your goals for the solution; the literature you consulted, the data you collected, the knowledge you drew on to inform initial decisions and actions to solve the problem; the evaluation process you designed to ensure you had evidence to check if your goals were being met and how well; the decisions (changes, adaptations, adjustments) you made in response to evaluation data, the trend of improvement resulting from a scholarly, creative process of evidence-based change.
- Argue persuasively. Make sure there is a clear narrative: illustrate the contribution, link activities to quality and impact on the wider community. Tell a coherent story through evidenced-based persuasive writing rather than description.
- Lead the reader through your story in a logical manner. An award nomination is not a mystery novel. Readers shouldn't have to wait until the end to understand what it is all about.

Write clearly and to the criteria

- Write to the criteria and do not second guess the matrix. Make sure that the keywords in your suggested citation are mapped throughout your application; this means expressly signposting your claims and supporting them with relevant evidence. Be sure that your contribution covers the minimum period threshold required and that claims of creativity, innovation, and novelty are well-supported (i.e. explain what the norm is and how/why you departed from it).
- Ensure you are meeting and presenting evidence for all aspects as detailed in the assessment matrix. Aim to meet all aspects of the HR descriptor. Missing one key aspect negatively impacts the overall application.
- Give equal weight to each of the four criteria. Use a narrative to show how your program, initiative or practice has developed and improved over time (with evidence demonstrating sustained impact). Ensure your focus is on the students and the impacts on them.

- Ensure all the important information is included in the nomination. Some previous applicants had too much information in the appendices or websites.

Be specific and contextualise your achievements

- Make your claims convincing: what were the goals or challenges you were addressing, what did you do and why give specific examples and tell us what informed these practices, how well did it work, what's the evidence (from students' perceptions, behaviours, learning, from peers, your own reflections etc), what further impacts did it have, what were your reflections on the evidence, what did you change for next time and why?
- Put achievements in context. Some actions might be great in one domain but seem ordinary in another. Make it easy for the assessors to see why you are fabulous.
- Recognise that the process/context of awards and/or recognition from your discipline may need some explanation to maximise their impact for your nomination.
- Consider the audience doesn't know your discipline area - if something you are doing is new or innovative for your discipline, mention it!
- Be really specific - your application will be read by people who will not be familiar with your context so be very clear about what you have done, the impact of your work and then the evidence to support the impact.

Refine your application

- Structure your nomination effectively, using clear paragraphs, some white space and use visuals/graphs to break up the text. Use headings to signpost the criteria. Reading large walls of text is very difficult for assessors to wade through and find the relevant evidence to support your claims.
- Ask someone completely outside your field to read your nomination before you submit it to check if they understand it - this helps with clarity and communication.
- Double and triple-check your application for consistency, repetition and spelling and grammar issues.

Work with referees

- Give your referees a copy of your application, brief them about AAUT, give them a copy of the assessment matrix and make sure they understand that a reference for a national teaching award or citation application is not the same as a reference for a promotion application. Stronger references dive deeper to further substantiate the claims made in their nomination.

Link to scholarship and frame impact

- Scholarship of Learning and Teaching is fundamental to frame nominations. Make sure you place your nomination/innovation in the context of the literature. Ensure the pedagogy theory clearly links with the initiative rather than being an add on at the end of the process.
- Ensure the nomination engages with *contemporary* scholarship of teaching literature. Reference to only one or two scholars is not showing wide engagement with the pedagogical literature.
- Think about the number of references you include – do they all support your claims/philosophy?
- Lots of academics engage in wonderful and innovative teaching, but the award should focus on the impact of that teaching, rather than the teaching itself.

- Understand that passion and solid reviews from students are a given for nominees at the national level, so consider how you're going to best use the real estate in a nomination to show what makes you beyond exceptional.

PROVIDING EVIDENCE OF YOUR CLAIMS

Understand what counts as evidence

- Look at the assessment matrix and broaden your understanding of what constitutes evidence when compiling your nomination.
- Don't proceed with your nomination if you don't have enough evidence of the types advised. It doesn't matter how good your program/teaching/activity is – if you can't evidence it to demonstrate this at a national level, your nomination won't succeed. Instead, concentrate on gathering your evidence and put forward your nomination in a future year. And ask a colleague if you can read their successful nomination.

Use a range of evidence

- Focus on triangulating your claims with multiple forms of evidence, student, peers, industry or equivalent and qualitative and quantitative. Assessors want to see a methodical approach to demonstrating what works and why. Provide as much supporting documentation/references as possible – the more the better, including outside your immediate sphere of influence.
- Consider the three-legged stool approach: 1. Make a claim (with a persuasive narrative). 2. Give evidence for that claim. 3. Tell us about the impact of that claim.
- Always ensure that your claim is backed up with evidence that is linked to student learning outcomes. Evidence of learning impact is KING!
- Quotes are illustrative and not quantitative evidence!

Demonstrate breadth of impact

- Provide evidence for breadth of influence and impact. Make sure you include evidence of esteem from the wider sector. It's great to include quotes and data to show successful application of your work outside of your institution.

Show evidence of continuous improvement

- Offer a variety of data to support your claims - do not rely solely on one method - particularly if it is qualitative. When showing the quantitative - do not leave out the warts - this will be noticed. It is ok to show the failures - particularly if there is a comeback story - we then get to hear the voice of the whole student story (valuable) as well as your reflective practice.
- Demonstrate evidence over time and do not claim something is continuous improvement when relying on evidence that is a few years old.