Dear You,

Congratulations again on your teaching award! As I said when we bumped into each other earlier, this is very well-deserved recognition!

Now, when we were talking, you mentioned that you’ve been wondering about what you put in your application that led to this success. Having been on a few assessment panels, I have some understanding of why and how certain applications stand out, so here, in this email, are some ideas on why assessors said ‘YES’ to your application and to your award.

You started with a bang. Your very first line ‘hooked’ the reader, making them sit up (even after reading a dozen applications) and pay attention to what you were promising to reveal about new or tried-and-tested ways to engage students and excite passion for learning, even (especially) in the seemingly driest of subjects.

You clearly care about good communication. Just reading your application, your reader was able to see you’re an excellent teacher because your application included succinct and straightforward descriptions and explanations of any complex ideas and concepts while minimising jargon and buzz words; you explained any necessary technical terms; all the while keeping your sentences short, clear, and to the point. You wrote clearly and concisely, yet engagingly, even passionately about teaching.

You approached this application as a scholarly work. You wrote knowledgeably about educational theories and methods, and you are obviously familiar with the pedagogical literature, both for higher education and your discipline. You consider it important that your teaching is informed by research (again, in higher education and your discipline) and so your application included reference to that research, whether your own or that of others.

You addressed the criteria. You obviously familiarised yourself with the criteria and with the rubrics used to assess the application, because you structured your written statement to make it very clear which criteria you were addressing. And your application was very focused: you selected at least two criteria but no more than three, and you didn’t waste precious word-space or page limits, trying to cover it all.

You presented outstanding evidence against the criteria. Not because it was all positive feedback (although most of it definitely was) but because it was so thorough, presenting data from a variety of sources: your own reflections, feedback from students and peers, institutional data and the literature on learning and teaching in higher education.

You included qualitative and quantitative data. You provided important background data on your teaching context: unit titles, course/s, class sizes, the demographics of your students. You provided more specific data: summaries of grade results, results from Student Evaluation surveys such as Learner Evaluation of Units (LEUs) and Learner Evaluation of Teaching (LETs). You included student comments, both from evaluation surveys and also, selected quotes from unsolicited comments (spoken, email, written) that spoke to some excellent aspect of your teaching. Perhaps most importantly, you made clear connections
between what the data showed about what students needed from their learning, and how you adjusted your own practice to meet those needs.

You remembered that peer feedback and support is essential for quality teaching. So your evidence included colleagues’ written support, feedback, and results of any peer review. National and international recognition of your (teaching) work, invitations to present on aspects of your teaching practice, publication in scholarly and professional journals on your teaching, and of course, other teaching awards. You also seemed to recognise that while solicited reference statements from colleagues are useful, positive peer feedback that was clearly unsolicited and spoke very well of some aspect of your teaching and educational leadership, are particularly compelling.

Your application met - and did not exceed - formatting requirements and limits. Other not-so-correctly-formatted-applications would have distracted (and to be completely honest, irritated) the assessors. You’ve also made sure to provide all the required information outlined in the application guidelines. Believe me, this sort of attention to detail counts with assessors as much as it counts with you when you’re assessing student work.

You read the Guidelines and the FAQs.  
Your written statement did not exceed the word limit.  
Your evidence did not exceed the page limit.  
The videos you included were no longer than 3 minutes.

Last, as an assessor-reader, any application that did these three things pretty much always tipped me over the line to say YES:

You showed how you approach teaching as profession, art, craft, practice, science, or (preferably), all of these. In relatively few words you managed to convey how hard you work at improving your teaching, what’s worked for you as a teacher, and even a little bit on what hasn’t. You considered this application an opportunity, not only to teach others about your teaching, but to give them a glimpse into how you teach, how you think about and approach.

You told a story. Not just the story of the What, Where, When, How and Why you (love to) teach, but some of the ways you make real connections with students, peers and colleagues to ensure that people get what they need now for their own learning and development, but also strategies, ideas, ways of thinking, acting, and be-ing that will support their learning in the future. In short, you tell a really good ‘story about learning’, and even though it’s an award application, not a novel, as your reader, I wanted to stick with you until the end to find out what happened.

Perhaps most importantly, you shared your vision for success. You owned your work on improving teaching and learning and the positive results that you purposefully planned and worked for. I’m no longer a student but I’m fairly sure that by the time I finished reading your application, I was ready to enrol in one of your classes so I could experience first-hand your knowledge, your enthusiasm, your obvious pleasure and serious engagement in working with students and colleagues in learning and teaching.

Hope the above helps with future applications – or at least reminds you of all the things you did so well here.

Karina