



## **Top tips to bear in mind when writing your award entry**

### **1) Start early**

Give yourself plenty of time to prepare your entry. Find out the entry deadline and make a start on gathering the information required for your chosen category at least 4-6 weeks ahead; the deadline is non-negotiable. Some past entries suggest keeping a diary of all that has happened throughout the year – often you forget just what has been achieved, especially if it has happened at the beginning of the year. Preparation is important. Read the entry form carefully and consider which part of the business story will address the scoring criteria and how to get as much information as necessary into the submission without exceeding the word limit.

### **2) Do your research**

Contact either myself, or any other business that have entered before and ask them what they're looking for in an award-winning entry. If possible, take a look at last year's winning website and social media platforms. Attending White Rose Award workshops are an invaluable tool for gaining insight into the benefits of being shortlisted and hearing in person top tips for writing a submission. On occasions past winners often attend to hear firsthand of the latest changes and are happy to listen and share your thoughts and ideas.

### **3) Get buy-in**

It's all about teamwork...so make sure your peers and senior managers are aware of the awards and get their support with the entry. They can provide you with useful information and invaluable feedback to help you create the best possible entry.

Producing a successful entry is extremely time-consuming. If you don't have the internal resource to spend time on producing the entry, or you feel you need expert guidance, there are external award entry specialists who can help you. However, I would say 'no one knows your business like you do'

### **4) Keep it simple**

Focus on what the judges are actually asking for in the judging criteria. Don't just fill your entry with the contents just to meet the word count. Always write in plain English with no unexplained acronyms or jargon. Make sure the entry is succinct, clear and easy to understand. Being so close to and passionate about what you're explaining will result in a wealth of material, so then it's an editing job. Consider bullet points and short sentences with impact.

There's a balancing act between content and word limits; If you need to explain things further and the word count is running out use the sections at the end of each question 'Enter links to supplementary evidence' by using a link to a dummy page on your website

The judges don't know your story, but they do know the awards and the specified criteria, so get to the point, but don't miss out important information. Some background is always worthwhile.

Stick to the facts and follow the award guidelines closely, but don't be afraid of a little creativity in your writing. You don't want to bore your reader, although you don't want to oversell your story with creative copywriting either. Let the facts speak for themselves.



## 5) Tell a story

Yes, of course meet the strict judging criteria and do answer all the questions, but ensure that in doing so, you tell a story with a dramatic opener and an engaging tone throughout. While doing all this within the word limit with so many mandatory questions is far from quick or easy, you can guarantee that the winning entry will have done exactly that. Do also remember this is the 'White Rose Awards' – any relevant reference to Yorkshire would be advantageous – this could be locally source products, recruitment of staff etc

## 6) The all-important WOW

While you can get a high mark in each section with well-evidenced responses, you need to also bear in mind that this is not a box-ticking exercise. To maximise your chances to be shortlisted, you also need to attempt to induce a 'wow' response from the judges. Sometimes stories are so strong or ground-breaking that this 'wow factor' is almost handed to you on a plate. However, while the extraordinary aspects of your achievements may seem obvious to you, you cannot leave it up to the judge to spot the miraculous from the mundane. For example, a potentially standout story can all too often be so diluted by ordinary good practice – or, worse still, weakened by a lack of evidence – that it simply fails to pack a punch. If something is unique to your business – or the industry as a whole – make it obvious!

Your job is to 'find the wow' and focus your precious word count on emphasising this. For most companies, especially larger organisations with an abundance of stories on the table, this is easier said than done. There is no one-size-fits all approach here sadly, because by definition each 'wow' has to be unique. However, if you simply accept that you need this as a vital ingredient to your entry, then that alone has made reading this article worthwhile.

What makes your submission different from everyone else's; remember the judges

## 7) Prove it

Demonstrate how you have achieved clear benefits to the business, its employees, your customers and the general public. Always back up your claims with hard evidence, especially statistical and testimonial. Provide compelling before and after data, and quotes from third parties, wherever possible. Being 'well evidenced' is the tricky part here – you need to quantify every single assertion you make with suitable data /information.

## 8) Content: Proof-read it

Let your award entry (and yourself) rest before picking it up to proofread. You will be able to pick up on mistakes much easier with a clear head and a bit of distance.

Now that you've proof-read your entry, it's time to pass it to a colleague, friend or family member to check for clarity, errors and omissions. When you've worked on a piece of writing for so long you can no longer be objective about its impact because you know what you mean, but the judges might not! Think carefully about how you can prove your claims and look at both the qualitative and quantitative metrics you could use. Customer testimonials can have great impact, so don't forget to ask a few of your friendliest clients for a couple of sentences about your business or the project you're entering for the award.



### **9) Keep checking**

Be sure to check your entry thoroughly before submitting. Sloppy spelling, grammar and typos may give the judges the impression that you have not put enough effort into the entry process.

### **10) Get feedback**

As an employee of the company, it's often hard to be objective when writing an award entry. So why not ask a third party to review your application and provide feedback. In addition to writing your entry from scratch.

### **11) Learn from the experience**

If you don't win at the first attempt, learn from the process and try again next year. In the meantime, you can use the award entry process as a tool for assessing and benchmarking your performance. This assessment will help you identify improvements and developments that can be made across the business, with the aim of providing you with that all-important competitive advantage and thus increasing your chances of winning awards in the future.

### **12) Feedback from the 2019 WRA**

- Make sure your website is up-to-date and does everything you profess it does
- Is your website clear, user friendly and technologically sound?
- Are you replying to comments both positive and negative on social media?
- Do you have an accessibility statement?
- Do you have a sustainability programme?

Lastly, have fun. Awards are a fantastic recognition of great work, great people and great companies.

You should be proud to be setting out your entry, so take the time to edit it down to the word limit and check all spelling and grammar.

Then, when you're shortlisted, get the suits and dresses at the ready for a great night at the ceremony, regardless of the outcomes!

**GOOD LUCK**



**Why apply and go through the application process?**

**GREAT - BECAUSE THE PROCESS OF APPLYING, GATHERING EVIDENCE GIVES YOUR BUSINESS A KICK UP THE .... in other words, it's the best "self-audit" going; and having to do it to a fixed date and deadline focusses one's mind and attention!**

**And as the process of applying changes year on year; the evidence and self-audit you undertake as a business needs to adapt and change too – no dusting off last year's application!!!**

**Finally – if successfully shortlisted and mystery shopped – that audit on you is worth its weight in gold – and its independent too!**

**Warmest regards**

**Nick**



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