

# Preparing Your Package: A Judge's Advice

## Rod Machado

Each year organizations solicit applications for their award programs. For example, the General Aviation Awards program (<http://www.GeneralAviationAwards.org/>) seeks candidates and applications for the four local, regional, and national awards: CFI of the Year, Aviation Maintenance Technician (AMT) of the Year, Avionics Technician of the Year, and FAAS Team Representative of the Year. The following ideas will help you better prepare a successful nomination / application package.

- ✍ The most important element in a successful nomination package is the nominee him or herself. Plan to involve the nominee in every step of the process. Who but the candidate can possibly know or have access to all of the required information necessary to properly complete the package? Don't try to make it a surprise! As an alternative, assist the individual in nominating him or herself.
- ✍ The objective of an award submission is to provide the judges with reasons why the candidate should be selected over all others. The first step in doing this is to make the application as appealing and legible as possible. A typewritten application is far more user-friendly than a handwritten one. This isn't rocket science, yet some applications look like they've been etched in ether by an elderly scribe. Sure, everyone likes the personal touch, but not here. Computers and word processing software now exist. Use them. If a judge has to fight to read every word, it's likely to be a short fight and a losing battle.
- ✍ Remember that most award programs require submission of certain specific information and document copies. That information is used to validate a candidate's credentials and make the evaluation process as objective as possible. Some programs also limit the amount or type of material that may be submitted. Make sure you read the instructions and adhere to the published guidelines. Submitting only the application forms with none of the additional required information to support your candidate is not a rousing endorsement and may even be disqualifying. Nor is it likely to get much attention from any judge, even if your nominee were Charles Lindbergh, Chuck Yeager, or a Wright brother. On the other hand, submitting every book the candidate has written is more likely to be a distraction than an asset in making your case. A photocopy of the nominee's book cover and the table of contents (if he or she has written a book), copies of the articles or a picture of his or her accomplishments (e.g., a resource the individual developed to help instructors teach) is usually the best way to make the point.
- ✍ Submit the required number of supporting statements from a wide range of supporters (e.g., from students to public officials to captains of industry to FBO owners). You're trying to make the case that the candidate is recognized far and wide for his or her knowledge, ability, and accomplishments. An application supported solely by a note from the nominee's mom is unlikely to make the cut.
- ✍ Since CFI of the Year nominees are individuals who've trained or assisted others in aviation, try to include a representative sample of short testimonials by individuals who've been helped by your nominee. One or 2-page letters are usually more effective than long letters. Judges are volunteers and busy professionals with the same time limitations we all have.
- ✍ Just because you ask someone to write a letter of recommendation or a testimonial doesn't mean that you'll get it during this millennium. Trust me here. You should start at least six months in advance when making these requests. Count on making the request multiple times before receiving a response. In some cases, you may even need to send a pen and paper to some individuals if you hope to get a letter of recommendation (I'm not kidding here, either). Does this mean that people you've asked to be endorsers don't think much of the candidate? Not at all! The facts are that everyone is busy, it isn't the highest priority for those you've asked, and most people aren't easy or natural writers. If a person says he or she wants to offer a recommendation, it's your job to be the facilitator, the midwife. This can

involve taking dictation over the phone or turning bullet points into a letter for editing and review by the author-to-be. Do it. Send the completed letter to its “author” for his or her editing and signature. Not everyone’s a writer, but everybody *is* an editor. Make sure you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for its return or ask that it be sent electronically. If testimonials are important to the application, then this is what it’s going to take in some cases to obtain them. When asked to write letters of recommendation, many people routinely request a copy of a current résumé along with a list of specific points the individual needs to have addressed in the letter.

✍ Construct your submission package to sell your candidate. It’s an “eye candy” thing. Create your package to get a judge’s **attention**, to make your nominee **interesting** to the judge, to earn the judge’s **conviction** that your nominee is unique and worthy of the award, and increase his/her **desire** to see your nominee chosen. Don’t assume that just because you think your nominee is the most deserving individual on the planet that everyone else will immediately reach the same conclusion if you merely utter the candidate’s name. Make sure your introduction letter highlights the reasons why your candidate deserves this recognition. Give examples with an emphasis on what’s unique, innovative and different in your nominee’s performance. You can assume that **all** nominees are “great” so saying that doesn’t advance your case very far. State your case, then prove it. Saying that it’s so doesn’t make it so. Show evidence of any and all specific accomplishments by your nominee. Evidence can be in the form of written testimonials, documentation, pictures, licenses, logbook copies, newspaper clippings, personal correspondence, awards and other formal recognitions, etc.

✍ Be considerate enough to put together a nice looking package that’s easy to navigate. Again, think “eye candy.” Yes, presentation and neatness count, even if it doesn’t say so in the rules. It’s amazing that some folks won’t even take the time to assemble an applicant’s material in a format that’s pleasing to the eye. Often, piles of paper arrive, badly photocopied, bent, battered, bundled and stapled together and in general, treated as if they’d just come off the wall of a shack located on the Bikini Atoll atomic test site. With some applications, it’s as if nary a second (or even first) thought was given to the assembly of such important material. Right or wrong, a neatly assembled application is more likely to impress a judge because it represents thoroughness and attention to detail, not to mention being a far more welcome invitation to read what’s inside. Be attentive to detail and neatness. After all, if **you** don’t care about your nominee, why should the judge?

✍ Use a little common sense. If you send in only one copy of the application package, then this must be disassembled, photocopied in sufficient numbers for all judges (usually about 3 or 4), and reassembled for distribution to all judges. The reassembled version may or may not look the way you intended. Each time something is photocopied **again**, it looks a little less professional. So, seize the moment and the initiative. It’s not mandatory, but if you want to maximize your nominee’s chances, prepare a package for each judge. Be like Frank Sinatra and “have it your way.”

✍ If you want to submit an award nomination package, plan to do a lot of footwork to bring the entire submission package together. You have to be the driving force behind the package’s creation and completion. Don’t rely on anyone -- other than the nominee -- to help you in this endeavor. They’re much more likely to talk about helping than they are to actually do it. A nomination is not just a thought, but also a huge commitment of time and energy. If your candidate means as much to you as he or she probably does, then be prepared to take the time to assemble the application package in a way that best demonstrates your nominee’s strengths. Your nominee will surely appreciate the investment of time and energy you put into the project.....and believe me on this, so will the judges!

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