



CabinetOffice

Honours

How to Write Citations

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**Making
government
work better**

Who deserves an honour?

Honours exist to recognise and celebrate outstanding achievements. There are always fewer honours than people who deserve them and because they are rare, they should be reserved for people:

- who have changed things - especially by solid, practical achievement;
- whose work has brought distinction to British life or enhanced the UK's reputation in their area or activity.

Unless your candidate has shown one or both of these characteristics, find some other way of recognising their contribution, do not recommend them for an honour. But if they do stand out in this way, read on.

How do I write a citation?

The citation should tell the story of what your candidate has done.

Give examples of how this outstanding quality has been demonstrated. Show how your candidate has:

- contributed in a distinctive way to improving the lot of those less able to help themselves;
- devoted themselves to sustained and selfless voluntary service;
- shown innovation or creativity in delivering lasting results.

A good citation should also describe as vividly and precisely as possible the difference their contribution has made. - How were things before they began? -How are they now?

Give details to support these claims. Show how your candidate has:

- earned the respect of their peers and become a role model in their field;
- produced, perhaps against the odds, sustained achievement which has required moral courage, vision, the ability to make tough choices or determined application and hard work.

How should a citation sound?

Honours Selection Committees judge candidates' merits on the citations you write for them. A citation should not simply be an extended CV, a list of educational achievements, appointments, awards or posts, or a job description showing what the person has done. Because poor citations often list these things, a frequent complaint from Committees is that the person recommended is "doing no more than their paid job".

Instead, your citation should describe what is special about your candidate's achievements and show memorably and persuasively how and where they have made a difference.

Here are some disguised examples from persuasive citations:

“She has transformed the agency from an organisation troubled by high profile technical operational challenges into a highly effective body with 96% of customers satisfied with the services her staff provide. The IT system is user friendly and a model of good practice.”

“He found that the charity was wasting over a £1m a year on time-consuming inefficient administration and had no effective PR. He altered procedures, cut staff and adopted a ‘can do’ approach by putting the people the organisation was supposed to be helping at the top of his priority list, rather than at the bottom.”

“He lived on an estate with high numbers of single mothers and disaffected young people but, instead of moaning about the youth of today, he started to listen to them and, as a result, started a club with sporting activities and facilities for mothers and their children. This is now used by 500 local teenagers. He had to work hard to gain the support of police and other agencies but was determined to succeed. Now, a once crime-ridden, hugely unpopular estate, is thriving with a real sense of purpose and achievement and crime rates have plummeted.

“When she took over the company it was running at an annual loss of £4.2m and it took her five years to produce a healthy profit of £2.5m. She has maintained a steady increase in profits since 2001 with a £.7.2m profit in year ended March 2006. Employees have increased from 356 to 870 in her time, in an area of high unemployment following the closure of the local car plant”

“She has devoted most of her spare time to running a social club for elderly people with learning difficulties. She says such people are sadly neglected in society and, although she is in full-time employment in a Tesco store, she runs this club with two helpers, a small budget and a lot of hard graft. Over the past five years, more than 200 people have benefited from the facilities, as well as their carers who have been given valuable respite from their responsibilities.”

“She is unusual because she is a black woman farmer in a rural county but she is keen to rid the world of stereotypes and uses her status to promote diversity and encourage women from non-British ethnic backgrounds to try different careers, particularly in male dominated industries like agriculture.”

“Although in full-time employment in local government, he gives up two evenings a week and all day Sunday to helping in the hospice. He has managed their very complex finances and is prepared to help behind the scenes or on the frontline, wherever he is most needed. He has contributed his services consistently for the last 32 years.”

“Under his expert financial guidance, the branch has grown from a small organisation with nine counsellors and a turnover of £10,000 to one of the largest centres in the South East with 44 counsellors and a turnover of £350,000”

As long as they are accurate, do not be afraid of using superlatives in citations. Honours exist specifically to recognise superlative achievement. But remember that superlatives without an explanation are just hot air. Take care always to support any assertions with hard evidence. Do not just tell the Committee that an achievement has had a widespread effect - describe what that effect has been and show why it has been important.

For example:

“The hospital was notorious with many cases of MRSA, dirty wards and an attitude that patients were a nuisance. She arrived and worked hard to improve standards over a two year period by instilling pride in her staff, and giving bonuses for those staff with clean wards where efficiency and a helpful attitude were the norm, not the exception. The rates of MRSA are now amongst the lowest in the country and staff turnover has been halved.”

It is achievements and effects of this kind and scale that deserve an honour and that will convince the Committee to endorse your recommendation.

How do I find the right words?

Effective citations often include nouns such as:

<i>determination</i>	<i>commitment</i>	<i>respect</i>
<i>drive</i>	<i>sustainability</i>	<i>recognition</i>
<i>innovation</i>	<i>creativity</i>	<i>selflessness</i>
<i>impact</i>	<i>zeal</i>	<i>performance</i>
<i>ambassador</i>		

adjectives such as:

<i>trusted</i>	<i>unstinting</i>	<i>conscientious</i>
<i>wise</i>	<i>inspirational</i>	<i>peerless</i>
<i>persuasive</i>	<i>passionate</i>	<i>exemplary</i>
<i>resourceful</i>	<i>enthusiastic</i>	<i>fair</i>
<i>tenacious</i>	<i>sympathetic</i>	<i>admired</i>
<i>unflustered</i>	<i>supportive</i>	<i>vibrant</i>
<i>dogged</i>	<i>articulate</i>	<i>diligent</i>
<i>dedicated</i>		

and phrases such as:

<i>making a difference</i>	<i>going the extra mile</i>
<i>role model</i>	<i>overcoming obstacles</i>
<i>head and shoulders above the rest</i>	

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