

# THE SMART APPLICANT'S SANITY-SAVING WORKBOOK FOR THE 2021 TRAINING TOP 125

Section-By-Section Insights,  
Expert Suggestions  
And Scoring Guidelines

(all in a handy, fully functional Word document)

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\* Qualitatively scored essay(s) | \*\* Requires short written response(s)

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## About this Document

The **Smart Applicant's Workbook for the Training Top 125** is designed to save you time and headaches, and help you present your learning initiatives in the best possible light. The workbook features:

- **T125 application questions** in a fully functional Word document, unlike the official application, which is “locked” and thus disabled for important functions like Find, Word Count and Spell Check. (FYI, the application is locked to enable it to be machine-read and quantitatively scored.)
- **Section-by-section insights** on how to bring out your learning organization’s strengths.
- **Official scoring guidelines**—inserted as relevant, so you can see them in context.
- **Sample essays**, including 2 winning Best Practice Award and 2 winning Outstanding New Training Award examples you can learn from.

Please note:

- This document is formatted differently from the official application to be sure no one accidentally submits the wrong document. The questions are identical, though in some places I added sub-numbering, e.g., 2.15a, 2.15b, etc., to make it easier to keep track.
- Because this is **NOT** the official application (which you can download [here](#)), **DO NOT submit it.**
- **Highlighted text** denotes a change from last year. Where relevant, previous text is ~~included with strikethrough~~ to enable comparisons. While SCORING has not changed, several scoring *descriptions* have changed.
- **\*\*\*VERY, VERY IMPORTANT\*\*\*** Compose, compile and edit your responses here. Once you’re **REALLY 100% DONE**, THEN copy them into the official application and submit.

What you should be looking for:

- **My comments are in orange, Trebuchet font (matching my other materials), on a gray background.**
- **SCORING GUIDELINES are in teal, Trebuchet font, in a dotted box**
- Some questions are scored both quantitatively and qualitatively; in these cases, the quantitative guidelines will appear first.

*Deb Arnold, Ink. is not affiliated with  
Training magazine or the Training Top 125 Award.*

## PART TWO: ABOUT YOUR TRAINING ORGANIZATION

If possible, please fill out this application based on the training programs throughout your entire organization. If you must refer to U.S.-based programs only, for example, please note that.

### 2.0 SUMMARY: Please explain why your organization should be named to the 2021 Training Top 125—what sets it apart from a learning and development perspective. (WORD LIMIT: 400 WORDS TOTAL) *Try for 300*

Points:  
0 quantitative  
1 qualitative

Here's your chance to make a GREAT first impression and help the judges understand how your team and L&D at your company are unique and special. *Set the right tone. Show 'em what you're made of.*

#### DO NOT:

- Write something that pretty much any company could write, like, “we offer blended learning.”
- Give a laundry list of programs.
- Neglect to include S&S (Scope and Scale - how big, how many, how much, how long).

#### DO:

- Show *\*what sets you apart\** from other L&D groups: your key strengths and innovations.
- Highlight your key accomplishments and innovations of the past 12 months.
- Emphasize achievement of **business goals**, backed up with **SMNQ metrics and concrete examples**, like “Stores that mandated the Acme Always-Friendly Customer Service Training program had 20% higher same-store sales and 32% higher customer feedback scores than stores that did not mandate the training.”
- Emphasize how you innovate by using specific language like “innovative,” “creative,” “breakthrough,” “unique,” etc., and consult the list of innovation types in the scoring guidelines below.

Need ideas? Take these three steps:

1. With your team, list the “Top 10 Reasons We’re Awesome” *without any programs*. Examples:
  - *Our business stakeholders trust and involve us as strategic partners, not order takers.*
  - *Our team regularly sets and achieves measurable learning and business outcomes.*
  - *We are passionate about using the latest in brain science and learning technologies.*
  - *We use design thinking for program design, involving learners in key decisions.*
  - *We achieve amazing outcomes on a small budget.*
2. Notice which ones make you smile the most.
3. Write about your top-smile awesomeness, using star program examples to back up your points.

#### QUALITATIVE SCORE (1 point)

##### Innovation of Training Programs and Delivery Methods (Sections 2.0 and 2.15)

It can be innovation from a training delivery, **content creation**, or **facilitation** standpoint; innovatively solving a problem/challenge with training; innovation in technology; innovation in training organizational strategy, evaluation method, tracking training, **communicating with learners/determining learner preferences**, etc. Innovation can be something new that blows your socks off or a creative way of using something that's been around for a while. Innovation can be found in new training **models/systems/process**. It can be found in new technologies. It can be found in cutting-edge research. It can be found in a new understanding of how people learn. Innovation also can be doing something in **training that no one else in your industry is doing.**

- .25 to 1 for innovation shown in Section 2.0.
- 0 to .5 for 3 examples showing innovation in Section 2.15.
- .75 to 1 for 6 areas showing innovation in Section 2.15.
- 1 to 1.5 for 9 areas showing innovation in Section 2.15.
- 1.75 to 2 for 12 areas showing innovation in Section 2.15.

#### Description:

Identify areas of training innovation the organization implemented in the last year (.25-1 point):

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## OUTSTANDING NEW TRAINING INITIATIVE AWARD

Points:  
0 quantitative  
5 qualitative

In addition to the Best Practice Awards described above, several winners also will receive an OUTSTANDING NEW TRAINING INITIATIVE AWARD. Please note that although these are separate awards, these nominations will factor into the overall qualitative scoring for the Top 125.

To nominate an outstanding initiative for consideration for this award, please describe an outstanding training and development initiative (EXCLUDING the formal programs nominated above for Best Practice Award consideration) **that your organization has undertaken in the last 12 months**. Such an initiative has shown success (please detail results) in one or more in short span of time but has not yet been proven over time in multiple scenarios. In time, it may become best practice.

**The Outstanding Training Initiative is scored on: Project scope, linkage to a corporate goal, innovation, reinforcement, senior leadership involvement, and Level 3 (behavior change) and Level 4 (business impact) results.**

This one can be tricky. The program must be less than 12 months old, but already “shown success.” To earn full points, follow the Best Practice Award guidelines, except metrics should include your early Level 3 AND/OR Level 4 successes and **anticipated impact**: what you plan to measure, any defined or estimated goals and, of course, how all this relates to a **SMNQ business goal**.

To WIN, choose a program with Best Practice potential - it’s scalable, replicable, etc. Examples:

- Highly successful new hire boot camp for certain engineering team that will become the blueprint for all engineering onboarding
- Sales simulation exercise that had tremendous impact for its pilot audience, and thus will be rolled out companywide
- Popular and effective learning game with diagnostic/prescriptive test engine that can be repurposed across multiple modalities

Note: Reinforcement (i.e. activities to reinforce learning from a given program) can be planned but not yet executed, given that the program must be new. Similarly, results can be preliminary. Unlike the Best Practice, which requires both [Level 3 AND 4 results](#), here they ask for one or the other (although both would be surely be just dandy).

See example below for further ideas and guidance.

### Outstanding Initiative (5 points)

Highlight project scope, use of training to achieve a specific, measurable corporate strategic goal, innovation, reinforcement, senior leadership involvement, and demonstrable Level 3 (behavior change) or Level 4 (business impact) results that tie back to the specific, measurable corporate strategic goal.

- **Project scope (1):** 1 for several business units/departments; .5 for a single business unit/department
- **Business/business unit Corporate goal (1 point):** .5 point for listing the **business or business unit corporate goal** and .5 point for the goal being specific, measurable, **and numerical (quantifiable)** (the goal can be one noted in Section 2.1 OR a different corporate goal).
- **Innovation (1):** .25 to 1 for innovation overall OR in the applicant’s industry.
- **Reinforcement (.5):** .25 for describing reinforcement methods and .25 for longer-term reinforcement (planned for 3+ months post-training)
- **Senior leadership involvement (.5):** .25 if senior leaders (C-suite or business unit execs) involved in program design, development or marketing and .25 point if involved in facilitation. Include titles of all execs.
- **Level 3 (behavior change) AND 4 (business impact) results (1 point):** 1 point for specific, numerical **(quantifiable)** Level 3 results AND/OR specific, numerical **(quantifiable)** Level 4 results as defined above (in either case, results must tie back to the original measurable **business or business unit corporate goal**).

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**2.3 HOURS OF TRAINING:** For each of the following "types of employees," how many PER-PERSON HOURS of formal, planned training (excluding orientation) does your organization provide employees ANNUALLY?  NFP

Points:  
2 quantitative  
0 qualitative

**Annual per-person hours**

1. Production/Line Employees
2. Supervisory Employees
3. Administration/Support Staff
4. Professional Employees
5. Sales/Account Management
6. Technical/IT Staff
7. Management Employees
8. Senior Management
9. Independent Contractors/Franchisees

Provide all POTENTIAL training hours an employee could take, NOT actual training hours completed.

Quantitative score (2 points)

Based on average hours trained (all hours above, divided by the 9 employee categories), score is:

- 0 for less than 20 hours
- 1 point for 20-40 hours
- 2 points for more than 40 hours

**2.4 What is the TOTAL number of each classification of TRAINING PROFESSIONALS in your organization?**

Points:  
2 quantitative  
0 qualitative

Full-Time Trainers:  NFP  
(35 hours/week)

Part-Time Trainers:  NFP  
(can include employees who spend at least 50% of their time on training but don't report to the Training function)

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs):  NFP  
(full-time employees responsible for some training)

Very important! "Trainers" are anyone who has any kind of L&D role, regardless of who they report to.

Note that SMEs are NOT part of the quantitative calculation but an FYI to the judges.

Quantitative score (2 points)

Based on the ratio of employees to trainers (total employees {2.14a+b} to total FT + PT trainers {2.4}):

- .5 point for 151 to 200 employees per trainer
- 1.5 points for between 100 and 150
- 3 points for less than 100

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**2.5 TRAINING BUDGET:** What is your company's TOTAL training budget for calendar year 2019-2020 or your current fiscal year? (Please provide your answer in the form of WHOLE NUMBER in U.S. dollars—do not use words, ranges, or abbreviations. Be sure to include training staff salaries, outside expenditures, materials, services, etc. You can choose to mark your answer NFP, but you MUST provide an answer.)

Points:  
0 quantitative  
0 qualitative

Total Training Budget \$  NFP

**\*Include all budget your company spends on training\***, whether or not it comes from your learning function (e.g. separate branch offices' training budgets, budget for conferences and travel, etc.).