Evaluation Committee Report Expectations

ATS Commission on Accrediting
(revised February 2018)
Evaluation Committee
Report Expectations
or
“Writing the report doesn’t have be so hard.”
Envisioning the Committee Report

1. Plan Ahead
2. Zoom In and Out
3. Know the Genre
4. Be Specific
5. Be Discreet
6. Don’t Be A Consultant
7. Conserve Energy
8. Be Kind
9. Be Grounded
10. Be Done
1. Plan Ahead

• It’s easy for the adrenaline rush to disappear at the exit interview; figure out how to keep your interest and energy going.

• It’s easy for the rest of your responsibilities to rush back in when your plane lands; be sure to carve out some time to finish your work.
# 1. Plan Ahead: Typical Timeline for Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel &amp; visit starts</td>
<td>Site visit</td>
<td>Site visit</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visit ends &amp; travel home</td>
<td>Chair editing...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Your sections due</td>
<td></td>
<td>Full draft due to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School responds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chair revising...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final report due to ATS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Plan Ahead: Timeline (your piece)

If you are **not** the chair, this means you:

- Participate with your colleagues on the last day of the visit to craft the committee recommendations.
- Finalize your sections as soon as possible after the visit, typically **within the first week after the visit**.
- Once the full draft is ready, give feedback about the report as a whole, including sections that were not your primary area of responsibility, if you wish.
If you **are** the chair, you also:

- Nudge/coach committee as needed.
- Combine the sections of the report into a coherent whole; edit as necessary.
- Work with the liaison to finalize the full draft report, (with the committee to check this, if desired), with the school around correction of errors, (ditto with committee?), and with the liaison as part of submitting the final version.
1. Plan Ahead: A Few Tips

• Don’t forget that writing is part of visiting!
• Begin with the end in mind
• Consider:
  – Do some writing in advance
  – Do some outlining in advance
  – Develop other prep strategies
  – Park downhill (e.g., start a document)
  – Carve out time
2. Zoom In and Out

• During the visit, you’ve likely been focused on the greatest areas of strength or concern.

• When writing, you’ll look more broadly, in relation to your Standards (ordinary things as well as very good and very bad).

• When writing, you’ll also look more narrowly, in relation to your Standards (small details as well as the big picture).

• You also be considering the school both “now” and throughout the coming period of accreditation.
3. Know the Genre

Remember the *Report Framework* and your writing assignments:

I. **INTRODUCTION** (Brief description of school, accreditation history, adequacy of self-study)

II. **GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL STANDARDS** (Standards 1-8)

III. **EDUCATIONAL STANDARD** (includes extension sites, distance education, assessment)

IV. **DEGREE PROGRAM STANDARDS** (for each degree or type of degree offered)

V. **COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS** (exit report)
“Each committee member is typically responsible for 3-5 standards and writing 1-2 pages on each of these.”

Think book review, not dissertation.

See also Self-Study Handbook chapter 4, pp.10-11, “writing the report”
3. Know the Genre

One way of framing the task:

- **Narrate**
  - What’s going on?

- **Evaluate**
  - Always in light of the Standards

- **Indicate**
  - What should they start doing / stop doing / keep doing?

Or:

- Narrate
- Affirm strengths
- Prompt change

Or:

- Describe
- Highlight strengths
- Describe areas for growth
- Articulate and explain follow-up actions

NAP
3. Know the Genre

One very important task is to give context or rationale for each area of needed growth, follow-up report, or other exit recommendation (focused visit, notation).

But remember this is not your only task!
3. Know the Genre

As part of this, remember that committee reports have multiple audiences:

• ATS Board of Commissioners
• The school, as it responds to the visit [this includes faculty and trustees]
• The school, in the future (e.g. the next new dean)
• The next comprehensive evaluation committee
4. Be Specific

The school’s unique MDiv program is a real strength.

[Describe the program and explain the strength]

The evaluation committee was uncomfortable with the institutional culture.

[Cite a Standard to talk about your concerns]

The finances are worrisome but there seems to be a plan.

[Cite other documents with more details]
5. Be Discreet

Dean Debbie is doing a great job of dealing with the prickliness of Professor Jones and the three most senior faculty members.

The school plans to sell its main campus, but has not announced this to its faculty or students yet.

As long as the school’s competitors don’t find out that it is doing x, it should see revenue growth this year.

In our interviews, the admissions director said he has no confidence in the new dean.
5. Be Discreet

- So, be specific but not too specific (and, discrete and discreet!)
- Use third person and speak on behalf of the committee.
- Tone should identify those facts about an institution that have led to a committee’s judgement.
6. Don’t be a consultant

- Tone should identify those facts about an institution that have led to a committee’s judgement ... but SHOULD NOT INDICATE WHAT THE INSTITUTION SHOULD DO.

{note: this is sometimes very hard}
6. Don’t be a consultant

The school should launch a certificate program to generate revenue.

Identify the “problem” rather than the “solution”

The school should sell its excess property and put it in the endowment.

Identify the “symptoms” rather than the “cause” (unless the self-study etc. also identified the cause)

The school’s enrollment problems are due to its reluctance to step into online education.
6. Don’t be a consultant

Some strategies:

• *Use language like “The committee observed…”*

• *Refer back to the self-study: “The committee concurs with the self-study report’s observation that…”*

• *Cite the Standards: “As the preface to Standard 7 states, Governance is a bond of trust…. The committee did not observe…”*

• *Borrow language from the Standards: “The Educational Standard notes that schools should evaluate their assessment plans, and also that these plans should be simple, sustainable, and sufficient. It was not clear to the committee... and so the committee suggests…”*
6. Don’t be a consultant

At the same time, don’t be afraid to be helpful.

• “The school’s assessment processes appear to be far too complicated for a school of this size; the committee suggests that the school consider simplifying this process, and encourages the school to review the ATS assessment guide...”

• “The evaluation committee observed that governance has been an ongoing area of concern for this school; the school might find it helpful to draw on external resources such as those from In Trust.”

• Remember that the word “recommend” should only be used in relation to the exit recommendations and must cite a Standard; but feel free to use “suggests, “encourages,” or “might consider.”
7. Conserve energy

Exhausted yet?

By Jessica Cross (Own work) [CC BY 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0)], via flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/jesscross/4092317144
7. Conserve energy

Exhausted yet?

By Arto Alanenpää (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)], via Wikimedia Commons,https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lego_dublo_arto_alanenpaa_5.JPG
7. Conserve energy

Remember that you already have the building blocks you need:

- *Self-study report*
- *Previous committee report (sometimes)*
- *Sample evaluation committee report*
- *Commission Standards*

Keep your audience in mind (i.e., don’t be redundant) but also don’t reinvent the wheel.
7. Conserve energy

Also:

- Use the pre-visit and visit time to help you gather info you will need for your report.
- Don’t obsess about small details, especially if you can’t find the answer.
- If you need more information, ask your committee members or liaison.
Remember:
“Writing the report doesn’t have to be so hard.”

And now, the home stretch:
8. Be Kind
9. Be Grounded

STANDARDS OF ACCREDITATION
- General Institutional Standards
- Educational Standard
- Degree Program Standards
10. Be Done