

WRITING THE SELF-STUDY: 3-PART FORMAT

A Note about External Audiences

While each institution is different – and each self-study will be different – there is value in consistent formatting of the self-study report. Similarity in the written product helps readers more easily understand a long narrative of an unfamiliar institution. It also supports the visiting team members, who are essentially strangers to each other at the start of the campus visit and must perform an important task quickly. Sufficient similarity also helps members of the Commission, who work as peer volunteers and must make sense of approximately 25 comprehensive self studies per year, associated team reports, institutional responses, policy considerations, and fifth-year reports.

Thus, rather than suggest uniformity among institutions, consistency in form is designed to provide a helpful genre for the external reader, as well as to focus the institution on what has proven over time to be the most useful format for reporting.

1. **DESCRIPTION** tells how the institution addresses all relevant parts of each of the *Standards for Accreditation*. The description helps provide a basis for the external audiences to understand what the institution does in the areas described by the Standard. A description of outcomes as well as processes should be included; for example, in addition to describing how the institution plans, it is useful to include a description of the key outcomes of planning. **EXAMPLE:** “Yearly planning is determined by senior administration in an annual retreat that results in a set of institutional goals.”
2. **APPRAISAL** conveys the institution’s self-evaluation of how well it addresses the Standards. What are the institution’s strengths in this area? On what aspects does it need to improve? Evidence (such as survey results) is included in the chapter and not just referred to. **EXAMPLE:** “The present planning process is systematic but does not include a broad-based representation. A campus survey conducted in 2005-06 showed that 60% of students and 30% of faculty felt uninformed about the institutional goals for the year.”
3. **PROJECTION** outlines the commitments the institution has made to preserve and enhance its strength and address those areas where it needs to improve. Mention of who is responsible and of timelines, where appropriate, help support the commitments. **EXAMPLE:** “By Fall 2008, we will create a planning committee with representation from senior administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The committee will establish a procedure for campus participation in planning of new initiatives and for communicating planning decisions.”

One way to address Appraisal and Projections

One institution chose to write the Appraisal section as a detailed outline of major strengths and concerns. In the Projections section, the institution indicated its follow-up actions, linked by numbers, for each of the strengths and concerns identified.

You may choose not to write your self-study using this format, but it can be a useful way to review your draft. When you read the Appraisal section for a standard, can you identify what you’re indicating are the principal institutional strengths in this area? Can you identify what the principal concerns are? Does the Projection section tell what the institution will do in the near future in this area to preserve its strengths, shore up areas of concern, and address those areas of anticipated change?