

## Writing Clear and Concise Narratives

- “**Think like the reviewer**” is a variation of “**know your audience**” dictum in public speaking and writing.
- Unhinge yourself from **parochial thinking**: your unique ways of talking about things need to be translated into common higher education language
- Understand reviewers’ assignments and make key information **readily accessible** – don’t make them dig!

## Writing Clear and Concise Narratives

- Organize the exposition of narrative and evidence to emphasize the **key decision points of the reviewer**
- Present a **plausible case** – not everything is perfect!
- **Minimize** the use of interesting but distracting materials
- Essential: Present a narrative and associated evidence in a form that **an interested and motivated reader can quickly review and render a judgment**
- Reviewers who are confused or required to dig to find needed information are less positively disposed.

## Answer all elements of the standard

- A primary **problem** in reports presented to SACSCOC is **failure of the institution to answer all aspects** of the standard which apply.
- Reviewers are instructed to ensure that institutions **address all aspects** of each standard.
- Some standards have a **single** theme; others are **multi-part**, with subordinate phrases and qualifiers.

## Answer all elements of the standard

- **Break down** each standard into its **component elements** and be sure that you **address all**.
- **Analyze and parse standards** with CC team members to refine understanding and application of the standards

## Presentation and Style

- Narrative **tells the institution's "story"** within the particular **focal area(s)** covered by the standard
- Accreditation writing is **unlike** any other type of writing: **avoid a public relations approach**
- Craft responses **to each standard into a free-standing chapter** – tell the whole story as it relates to the components of the standard – **reviewers may or may not review related chapters**

## Presentation and Style

- Be **declarative and forthright**
- Use of *past and present* tense. Use of *future* tense suggests that the institution is **not currently compliant**.
- Use of **sections and headers** to help reviewers keep their place – have to chapter organization point the reviewer to the case for compliance. Allow them to **skim**.

# Consistency

- Importance of **consistency**: Keep your story straight:
  - Multiple writers and time frames
- **Within and across chapters** of the narrative and in the evidence provided
- **Inconsistency** can affect reviewer's opinion regarding **integrity**
- Also: Be mindful of **expectations** created by CC for the **on-site visit**

## Declaring Less Than Compliant

- CC is an off-shoot of the **culture and practices** of your institution – there are **expectations** and push back
- Approach should be **declarative and forthright**
- Standard One: *Principle of Integrity* – **how you present things** provides information about **institutional integrity**.
  - Appearing unwilling to present all the facts **calls into question everything you have done**.



## Declaring Less Than Compliant

- Advice: **Lay out the facts** as they are then **outline a remedy** to the problem and declare partial compliance or non-compliance -  
- if you see the problem, chances are, so can the reviewer.
- You must provide a **specific, clearly articulated plan** to bring the institution into compliance.
- This is the case where the use of the **future tense** is appropriate –
- The **Focused Report** provides the opportunity to describe the actions taken to bring the institution into compliance and to provide supporting evidence.

## Declaring Less Than Compliant: Example

- 4.2.d The governing board defines and addresses potential conflict of interest for its members. (**Board conflict of interest**)

*While new Board members typically sign a conflict of interest agreement [cited examples] during their initial orientation, the Board does not have a formal conflict of interest policy. The chair of the Board's Bylaws and Policies Committee has drafted such a policy [cite draft] for consideration and possible adoption at the January 2018 Board meeting. This policy requires that each member of the Board sign a conflict of interest agreement each year.*

- *Provide the policy in the Focused Report*