

## Clearly Telling Your Story Notes MSS

- **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
  - State why the institution is in compliance and give evidence
- **Writing Style**
  - Simple declarative sentences; active voice for the most part. Be forthright.
  - Develop a Style Guide which will be particularly helpful with multiple writers
  - Include how you will abbreviate your institution (the College vs. RBC), Oxford Comma rule, Titles/Section configuration
  - Get a copy editor to get all chapters into the same voice.
  - Define common terms and use them consistently – online, distance learning // off-site location, distance campus
- Stick to the topic – answer the question – avoid "bird walks"
- **Analyze and deconstruct the standard** to identify the SCOPE of the standard and the various ASPECT – to formulate a comprehensive response.
  - Read the *Resource Manual* section on standard.
- **Organize your chapter** – and use titles to orient the reviewer. If you can, do so by the various aspects of the standard.
- .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
- Use of *past* and *present* tense. Use of *future* tense suggests that the institution is not currently compliant.
- **Importance of consistency: Keep your story straight:**
  - Within and across chapters of the narrative and in the evidence provided
  - Track related standards to ensure consistency across narratives – see *Resource Manual*
  - Inconsistency can affect reviewer's opinion regarding integrity
  - Also: Be mindful of expectations created by CC for the on-site visit
- **Use of Evidence** – Many/most of the substantial assertions you make should be supported by evidence.
  - Start gathering Documentation/Evidence early:
  - Minutes to key meetings – board, faculty meetings, curriculum are essential to demonstrate process
  - Embed access to evidence within the narrative.
  - Citation should be to a specific to assertion being make; demonstrating compliance.
    - Format large evidence documents to take reviewer to appropriate page of the document and highlight
  - Not just a policy, but evidence that the policy has been implemented; e.g., grade appeal form – not blank form, but a redacted version of a real form.

- **Presentation of evidence, documentation, tables and graphs**
  - Build drill-through tables allowing reviewer access to desired level of detail quickly – builds a sense of transparency
  - Presentation of evidence, documentation, tables and graphs
  - Label tables and graphs to track with the narrative, e.g. first table in 4.3 would be labelled **Table 4.3-1**
  - Use of figures to describe processes, e.g. **7.1 IE, Figure 7.1-1**
- **Build Redundancy Into the Process**
  - Have work of original author reviewed by a second knowledgeable writer.
  - Incorporate “levels” of review – have a new team review after initial drafts have been
  - Consider having external reviewer(s) to look at your materials from an outside perspective.
- **Declaring Less Than Compliant**
  - CC is an off-shoot of the culture and practices of your institution
  - 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.
  - Advice: Lay out the facts as they are, and if necessary, outline a remedy to the problem and declare partial compliance or non-compliance -- if you see the problem, so can the reviewer.
  - This is the case where the use of the *future* tense is appropriate –
  - You must provide a specific, clearly articulated plan to bring the institution into compliance.

- **Rules of Thumb**

- Institutional Effectiveness and Distance Learning/Off-Campus (if applicable) are concepts that need to be addressed across standards – not just those explicitly mentioning them. See the *Resource Manual*.
- Faculty oversees the curriculum – need to provide evidence of this in multiple places relating to curriculum approval ( 10.4), acceptance of credit (10.8), amount and level of credit (10.7)
- Remember: If the standard uses words “institution has policy/procedure.....” or “process” this means you must have policy, likely have to publish and must provide evidence that they policy has been implemented
- Always, always, always say “SACSCOC” not “SACS”
- Remember: Be sure that you have the most current version of the “Compliance Certification Document” (Template for CC)
  - Word Document
- If you use a vendor for your CC, be sure they have all standards preloaded correctly