



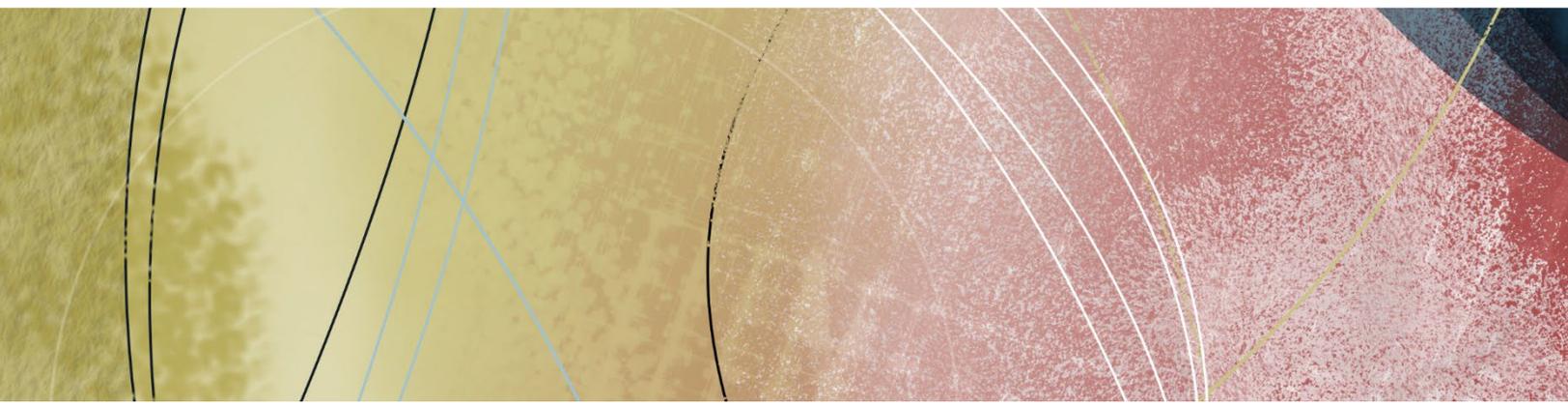
ACCJC

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Guide to Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement, and Peer Review

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2.3 Managing the Self-Evaluation Process

ACCJC staff liaisons typically reach out to an institution’s accreditation liaison officer (ALO) to schedule an ISER training for the designated organizing committee and other institutional representatives approximately 2.5 years prior to ISER submission. Many institutions use this training to kick-off their own internal processes. While the amount of time required to conduct the self-evaluation and develop the ISER varies by institution, the Commission suggests that institutions begin at least two years in advance of the ISER due date.

A realistic and detailed timetable for the self-evaluation process is essential for an effective process. Allow ample time to gather and analyze evidence, draft the report, review drafts, and complete final editing. Also allow time for institutional circulation and dialogue, approval by relevant internal constituencies, and submission to the Commission. One effective method for establishing a timetable is to begin with the ISER due date (see Table 1 below) and work backwards. This method helps to identify key milestones for institutional review and approval activities and more accurately estimate the amount of time that can reasonably be allowed for evidence gathering, analysis, and drafting the report itself.

Table 1. Submission Due Dates for Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports (ISERs)

	Site Visit in Fall	Site Visit in Spring
Visits through the end of Spring 2022	60 days before Visit	60 days before Visit
Visits scheduled for Fall 2022 and Beyond	Dec. 15 of prior year <i>(to accommodate Team ISER Review in spring prior to site visit)</i>	Aug. 1 of prior year <i>(to accommodate Team ISER Review in fall prior to site visit)</i>

For more information and guidance on developing the ISER timeline and other tips on ISER project management, see the “ISER Project Management” video in ACCJC’s [“Preparing the ISER” Educational Series](#).

2.4 Interpreting Accreditation Standards

The first step in the institutional analysis is to read and interpret each Standard. Taking the time to deliberately and intentionally work through each Standard not only ensures a more consistent understanding among all members of the self-evaluation team, it can also help with the identification and selection of relevant evidence (see Section 2.5). As the institution begins writing its response to each Standard, a precise understanding of the practice, policy, expectation, etc. described in each Standard will also help to ensure a more concise and focused narrative.

When interpreting a Standard, it can be helpful to deconstruct each sentence grammatically – in other words, begin by isolating the subjects and the verbs. Each statement in the Standards delineates something that the institution or an individual or group within the institution (i.e., the subject) is expected to do (i.e., the verb). From there, look for descriptive words and phrases that define the scope of the action that the institution, person, or group is supposed to engage in. The descriptive phrases frequently include parameters that limit the scope of the expected activity. For an example of how to apply this interpretation method, see the “Interpreting Standards” video in ACCJC’s [“Preparing the ISER” Educational Series](#).

2.5 Selecting and Formatting Evidence

Selecting Evidence

As noted above in Section 2.4, each Standard typically contains descriptive words and phrases that define and/or limit its scope. These can be particularly helpful for identifying relevant evidence, as well. When gathering evidence for the self-evaluation, include only evidence that pertains directly to the Standard in question and falls within its scope. The most effective sources of evidence are tied directly to Standards and clearly relevant to an institution’s unique mission.

There are many types of evidentiary documents that can demonstrate alignment with Standards and validate an institutional commitment to continuous quality improvement in pursuit of mission. As an institution engages in self-evaluation, it may consider evidence from a number of sources, including institutional databases, institutional fact books, catalogs, planning documents, and program reviews; and documents such as faculty handbooks, student handbooks, policy statements, minutes of important meetings, course outlines, and syllabi. Useful evidence may also be derived from survey results; from assessments of student work on examinations, class assignments, capstone projects, etc.; from faculty grading rubrics and assessment of student learning outcomes; and from special institutional research projects and reports.

Possible sources of evidence for each Standard can be found in Part II of this *Guide*. The lists of possible evidence are **not** intended as a checklist of required documentation. The evidence used to demonstrate alignment with Standards will vary from institution to institution, based on differences in mission, college culture, and regional expectations for college operations. Institutions may not have all of the documents listed as possible evidence, or they may have other documents that are better aligned with a given Standard. Each institution should carefully select evidence from its own ongoing practices that substantiates its assertions about the extent to which it aligns with Standards.

Generally speaking, institutions should identify relevant sources of evidence prior to drafting the ISER narrative. When identifying specific documents for inclusion in the ISER, institutions should be judicious and selective. Rather than overwhelming the peer review team with every document possible, include a representative sample of the most relevant evidence. The goal is to provide evidence that will substantiate the institution's analysis and narrative and demonstrate alignment with Standards. Aim for quality, not quantity.

For more discussion of evidence selection, see the "Evidence to Use" video in ACCJC's ["Preparing the ISER" Educational Series](#).

Formatting Evidence for Submission with the ISER

The Commission requires institutions to provide a copy of each evidentiary document cited so that there is a full record of the information available at the time of the comprehensive peer review. Therefore, when citing an institutional webpage as evidence, institutions are asked to "freeze" the page as a PDF or screenshot so that the evidence is not inadvertently moved or overwritten during a website update. Links from the ISER to a live website are strongly discouraged, as peer reviewers and/or Commissioners may sometimes need to work with the documents offline.

As described in Section 3.7 of this *Guide*, institutions must upload a copy of the final ISER and all evidence files to ACCJC's secure cloud service unless otherwise instructed by their staff liaison. Please note that the Commission expects that the ISER submitted by the institution will contain links to the evidence files that have been uploaded, rather than to a repository or live page on the institution's website.

As the final evidence documents are selected for inclusion in the ISER, please use the following good practices for formatting the evidence files:

1. Develop standardized abbreviations and file/folder naming conventions as appropriate to your institution, and use them consistently.
2. Use file names with 27 characters or less when possible.
3. Begin each file name with a reference number that identifies the Standard in which the evidence is referenced for the first time (e.g., 1A1-01_MissionStmnt; 1B1-10_2020StratPlan). If the document is cited again in a subsequent Standard, use the same reference number.
4. Avoid using filenames containing spaces, periods, slashes, or backslashes. (Hyphens and underscores are fine.)
5. Consider highlighting relevant portions of a document or providing specific page numbers to help readers quickly focus on pertinent information. This is particularly helpful for lengthy documents.

Appendix A: Suggested Formatting and Style Sheet

(Revised July 2014)

In Document	Formatting and Style
Titles	Calibri, 14 pt., bold
Subheadings	Calibri, 12 pt., bold
Body text	Calibri, 12 pt., Left Justified
Page numbers	Place in footer, either in bottom right or center
Margins	1" left; 1" right; 1" top; 1" bottom
• Bullets	Circle bullet, Times New Roman, 12 pt.
<u>Underline</u>	Use single line only. Do not use excessively.
<i>Italics</i>	Use italic font to emphasize, not bold font.
Acronyms	Spell out the names of groups on the first reference, followed by the acronym, e.g., the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). The acronym for U.S. Department of Education is ED (not E.D.)The acronym may be used alone on second reference.
Numbers	Spell out numbers one through and including ten; use numbers for larger numbers. A number that begins a sentence should be spelled out. Credit hours should be expressed as numerals.
Abbreviations	Spell out state names in text; abbreviate them only in addresses, lists, etc. Spell out "and" instead of the symbol "&" unless it is part of an official company name.
Commas	When a conjunction joins the last two elements in a series, use a comma before the conjunction (e.g., board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students). Commas always go inside quotation marks. Do not use excessively.
Colons	Colons go outside quotation marks unless they are part of the quotation itself.
Percentages	Spell out "percent." Use the symbol (%) only in scientific, technical, or statistical copy.
Latin terms	Do not underline or italicize.
a.m./p.m.	Express as "a.m." and "p.m." with periods and lowercase.
Hyphens	No spacing before or after hyphens. Hyphenate two-word adjectives used with a compound modifier (e.g., high-unit program). Do not hyphenate words beginning with "non," except those containing a proper noun (e.g., nonresident; non-German; non-degree-seeking) or when the second element consists of more than one word (e.g., a full-time student; attending school full time). Do not hyphenate words with the suffix "wide" (e.g., District wide; College wide).

In Document	Formatting and Style
Capitalization	<p>Capitalize the following words or phrases when referencing the Commission and/or the ACCJC Accreditation Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Commission” • “Accreditation Standards” • “Standards” (e.g., “In order to meet Accreditation Standards...”) <p>Capitalize “College” and “District” when referencing a specific college or district (i.e., capitalize when you can replace “College” with a college name and when you can replace “District” with a district name).</p> <p>Capitalize the first word following a colon when the word begins a complete sentence.</p> <p>Capitalize titles preceding names (e.g., Bay College President Chris Smith).</p> <p><i>Do not</i> capitalize the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “federal” or “state,” unless it is capitalized in an official name. • “fall” or “spring” (e.g., fall semester enrollment). • Titles following names or standing alone (e.g., Chris Smith, president of Bay College; Marcia S. Jones became president in 2001).

WRITING STYLE

- Be accurate. Nothing else matters if facts are not correct.
- Be concise. Avoid jargon. Keep it as to-the-point as possible.
- Be specific, definite, clear, and concrete. Explicit writing holds the attention of readers.
- Do not write in the first person (*We* or *us*); use third person (*the College*).
- Use the active voice. The active voice is more direct and vigorous than the passive voice.
 - Passive example: *Commencement was attended by hundreds of people.*
 - Active example: *Hundreds of people attended commencement.*
- Passive voice is acceptable when the agent of the action is unknown or unimportant.
 - Passive example: *Construction was completed three months early.*