



## Writing Chapters of the Accreditation Team Report

The school hosting the accreditation team has invested a great deal of energy, time, and money in preparation for the ISACS accreditation process, and it deserves a good accreditation team report: complete, thorough, honest, helpful, and well-written. The quality of the process will in large part be determined by the quality of the report.

All chapters of the report follow the same format. The team leader provides a writing template for team members. As a title, centered at the top of the page, please use the name of the general area being reported on. Each report includes three sections:

- GENERAL APPRAISAL
- COMMENDATIONS
- RECOMMENDATIONS

As team members write their chapters, keep in mind the audience who reads the report. The Accreditation Review Committee (ARC) reviews the report carefully before its accreditation recommendation to the ISACS Board of Trustees. Therefore, each chapter must be informative about the area it covers and offer recommendations intended to achieve school improvement. The school community (faculty, staff, administrators, governing body members, and perhaps a few families and students) also read it. It should be directive without being prescriptive and provide clear guidance for school improvement. The document should also be tactful in tone, and respectful of the school community.

The **GENERAL APPRAISAL** section is typically several paragraphs long. It contains factual and descriptive information about the area being covered. This provides the ARC with sufficient background to understand the program and its current status and establishes the foundation for the Commendations and Recommendations.

The appraisal section is objective in tone, presented in a straightforward manner without editorial comment. It does not directly or indirectly reference any individual. Rationale for the recommendations presented later is included in this section.

A team member may wish to make suggestions or to ask the school to review or examine certain policies or practices, but not create a recommendation which the school is required to respond to. This content may be included in the General Appraisal.

The **COMMENDATIONS** section is a numbered list of the particularly strong aspects of this area of the school program. Avoid generalized commendations which could apply to any reporting area or the personnel in any school. Give sincere recognition where deserved. Do not search for commendations just to round out a list. And, do not “damn with faint praise.”

The **RECOMMENDATIONS** section is the most critical segment of the entire report. It is a numbered list of the specific actions which the team believes the school should undertake in order to realize significant improvement in the school’s program. The school is required to respond to every recommendation made by the accreditation team, and to report on the action taken. Therefore, all recommendations included should be meaningful. The test for inclusion is simply this: **Would implementation of this recommendation result in meaningful improvement within this area of the school?** If it does not meet this test, do not include it.

The “average” team report includes from 25 to 30 individual chapters. If each chapter includes three recommendations, this would result in approximately 75-90 recommendations – a manageable number. But if each report includes five or six recommendations, the result would be anywhere from 150-180 – too many for almost any school to deal with efficiently and effectively. Don’t omit important recommendations for the sake of brevity. It may be appropriate to include more than three in any one section. Just be judicious in what you include.

If the General Appraisal section has provided the appropriate rationale, each recommendation should be a sentence or two specifically stating the desired action and outcome. Each recommendation should be **directive**, not **prescriptive**. It is the duty of the accreditation team to identify an action that will result in a desired outcome for school improvement (“The school should...in order to..”), but not tell the school exactly how to proceed.

**A strong word of caution:** In writing a recommendation, avoid equivocal verbs such as “consider, discuss, explore, investigate, continue to,” etc., unless the desired outcome of such action is also presented. Unless the accreditation team provides guidance, the school can fulfill its obligation without implementing any change whatsoever.

All recommendations should be realistic in terms of physical facilities, finances, and personnel. They should apply distinctively to the area under consideration and should not single out any individual by name or position. And any recommendation made must be consistent with the school’s mission. Recommendations should not cost the school large sums of money. Hiring another English teacher, for example, is not a reasonable recommendation unless there is evidence in the self-study report that this is going to happen anyway.

At the end of the accreditation team report, the team lists **Major Commendations and Major Recommendations**. These arise from common themes that emerged during the visit. Major Recommendations address school-wide issues and are broader in concept and application than the recommendations made within individual chapters. Major Recommendations begin with a succinct one-sentence goal. Many teams find it helpful to include an explanatory rationale that offers additional context for each major recommendation. In that case, the one-sentence action step of the recommendation is stated first and highlighted in boldface and italics. The rationale and/or elaboration then follows in regular font.