

Notes on Writing a Self-Study for Accreditation

- When writing a self-study report for your accrediting body, it is imperative that the narrative address each and every component of every standard. The sole exception is when the accrediting body's guidelines explicitly state that a section is only applicable to certain kinds of programs, in which case you may write "N/A" in response to that component if it's not applicable to yours. When drafting the text to address a given standard, you are advised to underline each distinct element of the standard. Then you should craft an evidence-supported narrative for each element that demonstrates that your program meets or exceeds that element. If your program doesn't meet that part of the standard, state precisely what your program plans to do to come into conformity with that component of the standard in the near future.
- The narrative should have headings and subheadings that make perfectly clear to the reader which component of the standard the subsequent text is addressing. As a general rule, it's a good practice to use the headings and enumeration that the accrediting body provides in their guidelines—typically, their numbered standards for accreditation—in the body of your narrative. You should feel free to add extra subheadings when you have a response with multiple components. The key is to make the reader's job easy!
- Start each "answer" (i.e., narrative and sub-narrative) by incorporating the question into your first sentence. For example, in response to the question "What is your process for assessing mission fulfillment?" you should have a heading (or subheading) called something like "Mission Fulfillment" or "Assessing the Program's Mission" under which you would start the narrative with a sentence such as, "EWU's X program uses a three-step process to assess its mission fulfillment," or "The following describes the process X program uses to assess whether it is fulfilling its mission."
- Provide evidence for all statements of fact. This is key! If the report puts forth an assertion (e.g., "Our faculty values diversity," "Our program is committed to excellence," "Our program meets the criteria for Standard X"), evidence is needed to support the claim.
 - Please note that evidence can take the form of any type of archived text, including (but not limited to) minutes of meetings, excerpts from the catalog, syllabi, student work, CVs, text from the EWU website, a screenshot of the website, a rubric, memoranda of understanding (MOUs). It can also be numbers (e.g., pass rates on a licensing exam, students' scores on a nationally normed major field test, the average score on an item from a student survey, data gathered by EWU's Office of Institutional Research, statistics from the National Center of Education Statistics).
 - Ideally, the evidence (when textual) is hyperlinked to the narrative so that readers can easily review it at the moment that the text references the evidence. Accrediting bodies tend to have specific rules regarding the use of hyperlinks, however. Some like them; others don't. Be sure to follow your body's style guidelines.
- Acknowledge your program's weaknesses (although don't go overboard!) and do so in a straightforward, non-defensive tone. After you report a shortcoming, tell the reviewers what you plan to do to address it. Reviewers know that all programs have shortcomings. They will want to

know that you are aware of those of your program, are transparent enough to share them with the reviewers, and have a sensible plan in place to rectify them. If your program has a “fatal flaw,” however, it’s likely better not to continue with the accreditation or re-accreditation process until you have addressed it sufficiently.

- Here are some rules of thumb to follow with regard to the assessment section of your self-study: report
 - The data collected need to logically derive from each student learning outcome. Metaphorically speaking, if you want to assess how fast your car can go, you should clock the car’s speed and not put the driver on a scale. Make sure that for each program learning outcome, you have used an appropriate “measuring” device. Contact Jill Kern, Dir. of Assessment & Accreditation, if you have questions about this at assessment@ewu.edu.
 - Your assessment data should be based on faculty members’ evaluations of student work and/or students’ test scores. Your assessment should not be based on grades or students’ reports about how much they have learned.
 - Provide your program’s expectations—your targets—for how students should fare on each PLO (i.e., the expected average “score”). State which average score would indicate that students have met or exceeded faculty expectations for student learning; what average score would indicate that students have failed to meet faculty expectations; and what range of scores are in between satisfactory and unsatisfactory.
 - Put your data in tables. (See example below).
 - Label the table with a straightforward title.
 - Label the columns and rows.
 - Insert only one piece of data per cell.
 - Indicate the sample size (i.e., number of students whose work was assessed), and when the data were collected (i.e., the quarter and year when the students produced the work that was assessed).
 - Indicate whether students have (a) achieved or exceeded expectations, (b) failed to achieve expectations, or (c) are in the gray zone.
 - State what you have done or will do to improve student learning in those areas where expectations haven’t been met or are in the gray zone.
 - State how, if at all, you plan to improve your assessment processes.
- Painstakingly proofread the document.
 - Check to make sure that the text is consistent, particularly when it comes to numbers. Inconsistency in the reporting of numbers is a very common mistake. You should, therefore, go over them with a fine-toothed comb. So, for example, be sure that the document doesn’t describe the program as a two-year degree and then present a table that shows it takes three

years to complete. Or, for instance, check that one narrative doesn't report that the 2015 entering class had 12 students while another states it had 14 students.

- Check to make sure that all hyperlinks work, all tables in the document are professional-looking, and all figures are legible.
- Check to make sure that references to appendices or other attachments in the body of the document accurately refer to the name of the appendix/attachment. For example, if you say, "See Appendix C for a sample syllabus," be sure that the sample syllabus appears in Appendix C.
- The grammar and punctuation (including capitalization) need to be impeccable.

Sample Assessment Table

English BA Program PLO Assessment Results (2019-22)										
		2019-20			2020-21			2021-22		
		Mean	Target	# Students	Mean	Target	# Students	Mean	Target	# Students
PLO-1	Out of 100%	91	+	103	88	+	117	93	+	110
PLO-2		83	~		87	+		91	+	
PLO-3		77	-		85	+		73	-	
PLO-3	Assessed on a 5-point	2.75	~	30	2.30	-	33	2.11	-	30
PLO-4		1.90	-		2.50	~		3.1	+	
PLO-5		3.95	+		2.45	~		2.89	~	
PLO-6		3.03	~		4.12	+		4.25	+	

Note: + = Met or exceeded target; ~ = Needs improvement; - = Below target

Students who earn a BA degree in English at EWU will be able to do the following:

PLO-1: Identify important literary periods

PLO-2: Identify major writers of fiction and poetry

PLO-3: Closely analyze literary texts using appropriate literary and critical vocabulary

PLO-4: Synthesize theoretical knowledge to produce original written interpretations of literary texts

PLO-5: Appropriately employ pertinent secondary sources in writing

PLO-6: Demonstrate effective communication skills in academic, professional, or creative writing

Self-Study Checklist

This checklist is designed to be used by authors of self-study reports and EWU reviewers responsible for ensuring quality control before the document is submitted to an accrediting body.

1. Is there a narrative that addresses each component of each standard?

Yes No

2. Do the document's headings and subheadings make patently clear to the reader which element of each standard the subsequent narrative addresses?

Yes No

3. Is every statement of fact supported with evidence that is provided either in the narrative or as an attachment/in an appendix?

Yes No

4. Does the document acknowledge the program's weaknesses in a non-defensive tone?

Yes No

5. Are the data put in one or more tables that are clearly labeled, complete, and easy to understand?

Yes No

6. Has the document been painstakingly proofread?

Yes No

7. Do you understand everything the document says?

Yes No

8. If you were a member of the accrediting body's review team, would you recommend to the accreditation commission that the program be (re-)accredited?

Yes No

Reviewers: Please provide feedback to the author(s) regarding each of the points above for which you checked "no."