



## Writing the Visiting Team Report

The school hosting the visiting team has invested a great deal of energy, time, and money in preparation for the ISACS accreditation process, and it deserves a good 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, which you and your team prepare.

All reports should follow the same format. As a title, centered at the top of the page, please use the name of the general area being reported on. Each report will then include three sections:

- GENERAL APPRAISAL
- COMMENDATIONS
- RECOMMENDATIONS

As team members write the reports, keep in mind the audience who will read the report. The Accreditation Review Committee (ARC) will review the report carefully before making their accreditation recommendation to the Board of Trustees. Therefore, each report must be informative about the area it covers and offer recommendations intended to achieve school improvement. The school community (faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, and perhaps a few parents and students) will 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 will probably be a few paragraphs long. It should contain factual and descriptive information about the area being covered. This provides the ARC with sufficient background to understand the program and its current situation, and establishes the foundation for the Commendations and Recommendations.

The appraisal section should be objective in tone, presented in a straightforward manner without editorial comment. It must not directly or indirectly reference any individual. Rationale for the recommendations presented later should be 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, although it is customary to include at least as many Commendations as Recommendations. 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 visiting team, and to report on the action taken. If you have had to prepare Reaction and Progress Reports, you understand this task! Therefore, all Recommendations included should be meaningful. The test for inclusion is simply this: **Would implementation of this Recommendation result in meaningful improvement within the school?** If it does not meet this test, do not include it.

The “average” team report will include from 25 to 30 individual reports. If each report 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, and 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 single statement specifically stating the desired action and outcome. Each Recommendation should be **directive**, not **prescriptive**. It is the duty of the visiting 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 visiting 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 Philosophy and Mission of the school. 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 that this is going to happen anyway.

At the end of the Visiting Team Report, the visiting team lists **Major Commendations and Major Recommendations**. These should also arise from common themes that emerged during the visit. Major Recommendations should address school-wide issues and be broader in concept and application than the recommendations made within individual reports. Major Recommendations should be stated as a succinct one-sentence goal; however, many teams find it helpful to include an explanatory rationale for each.