

Writing Tips for School Evaluations

A key task for members of the Visiting Committee is to reflect findings and observations in the Visiting Committee Report. Writing commendations and recommendations is a structured writing process that should result in concise statements about the school program. Statements that affirm well-developed schoolwide-improvement plans and commendable school practices are commendations. Recommendations are statements that provide guidance and encouragement to schools for implementing effective changes that will result in school improvement.

Three elements are to be included in all written commendations and recommendations:

- 1. Who:** Always address commendations or recommendations to people by group. Please identify the people group responsible for the school practice and list in hierarchical order. Use group names or titles, avoiding individual names.
Example: *The constituency, board, administration, and staff for . . .*
- 2. What:** In a short phrase, identify the educational activity, practice, or program that is commendable or being recommended for improvement. Address only one item in each commendation or recommendation. Specificity is important for future reading and response. Avoid vague phrases such as “It seems as though” or “The committee feels.” The Visiting Committee chairperson may have suggested action words that will facilitate the writing experience.

Unless it would be unclear to future readers, resist the addition of clarifying comments, such as a rationale statement, commendation/recommendation, or a description of the results of a recommended school activity or practice. Do not be prescriptive in recommendations. State what needs to be improved, but do not indicate methods for accomplishing the tasks..

- 3. Evidence:** Each commendation and recommendation needs to be documented. In parentheses at the end of the statement provide a reference that will identify the source of knowledge regarding the school activity or practice commended or recommended for improvement. This should be interviews, observations, a page number from the Self-study Report, the title of supplementary material examined, or one of the surveys. The Visiting Committee chairperson will provide the style that is desired for the Visiting Committee Report.
Example: (Interview; Observation, Self-study, pp. 4, 37; Supplementary Materials; Student Survey).