

Guide for Writing Reports

General

First and foremost, it needs to be made absolutely clear that **the onus of responsibility and burden of proof lie with schools to demonstrate compliance** with all applicable benchmarks. This means that it is the school's responsibility to clearly communicate how they are meeting the benchmark. *MEAC staff and reviewers will not go searching for evidence.* To state again, when writing any reports, the school must ensure that the submission is clearly and concisely written, that reviewers will be able to follow what is being communicated, and that the submission meets requirements.

Each Benchmark in MEAC's Standards for Accreditation has a set of required demonstrations. These demonstrations are how MEAC has designed for schools to address each benchmark. The demonstrations have key words that direct the school in what to do- describe, identify, state, summarize, explain (write a narrative) and provide, complete (upload evidence or documentation). See [Appendix 5: Benchmark Scoring](#). That stated, schools are not limited to just the published demonstrations. It is possible to communicate compliance with the benchmark in ways other than stated in the published demonstration. A word of caution: schools taking the approach of going outside the published demonstrations will need to take additional care to make sure the response clearly shows how the school is in compliance and must do so without making reviewers search for evidence (see onus of responsibility and burden of proof).

In considering how to respond to benchmarks, our accreditation staff like to use the toothbrush analogy. In the analogy, a parent is asked to demonstrate that toothbrushing is occurring.

- Example Response 1: Our children brush their teeth regularly.
- Example Response 2: All of our children brush their teeth on a daily basis.
- Example Response 3: All of our children brush their teeth twice each day, morning and night.
- Example Response 4: All three of our children brush their teeth for three minutes in the morning and for three minutes at night. In the mornings, parent one puts a dime-sized amount of toothpaste on each toothbrush. In the evenings, parent two applies the toothpaste. Each child plays their own toothbrushing podcast timer while brushing (see example appendix 1 for podcast playlist with playcounts). The parent supervises the brushing to ensure it is active and gets both sides of the mouth, top and bottom, inside and out (see example appendix 2 for toothbrushing log with parent sign-offs). After brushing, the children rinse, dry, and return the toothbrushes to the holder for the next brushing. Parent one replaces all the toothbrushes every two months with dentist-recommended brushes (see example appendix 3 for last ten months of receipts).

Note that in the above examples, each tells what happens, but only one provides a clearly written narrative of what happens, when it happens, how it happens, who does each step, what quality assurance is built into the process, and provides evidence that the process is occurring.

It can be easy when writing about your program or institution to overlook steps or pieces because you are so used to how it happens. An outside viewer will not have this level of familiarity with your program or institution and will need clear explanations. Apply this to how your school responds to benchmarks:

- Assume the reviewer knows nothing about your program/institution. (Be sure each submission can stand on its own- remember, MEAC will not go search for evidence.)
- Don't assume logical leaps will be made.
- Explain every step.
- Explain how what you are doing meets the requirement.
- Cover the who, what, when, where questions.
- Give context for the evidence provided.

- Make sure the evidence is recent/current and that it can directly support your demonstration of compliance- use excerpts or highlight the relevant parts so that reviewers don't need to search through full-length documents.
- Be sure your response is directly answering what is being asked.
- Limit any extra information- extra information and extra documentation can add confusion and makes it harder for reviewers to do their job. Quality over quantity.

Specific Instructions

Except where specifically instructed otherwise, personally identifiable information (PII) must be redacted for all students, administrative staff, and faculty in all submissions. **Submissions that have not been redacted will not be accepted**, which may result in a late fee being assessed. (Any documents that MEAC receives could be submitted for review by the US Department of Education, and documents submitted to the US Department of Education become publicly available under the Freedom of Information Act, so we want to protect PII wherever possible.)

Submissions made via email as well as all documentary evidence submitted via the online Weave accreditation portal must be in pdf format except where specifically instructed to submit documents in original format, such as MEAC excel worksheets. The pdf format ensures that a school's submission cannot be changed, except by the school. The original excel format on MEAC forms ensures MEAC can verify that the formulas are correctly working where autocalculations are made.

When submissions are made, MEAC staff will review the materials for completeness. Where pieces are missing, completed with errors, or unredacted, MEAC will notify the school as permitted. Note that any corrections or subsequent submissions must be done by the school. MEAC staff will not amend any school submission. (See onus of responsibility and burden of proof.)

Reports Currently Submitted Via the Weave Online Portal

The following will only be accepted via Weave: the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), Materials and Information Request (MIR) responses, and response to the DRAFT ARC Report as a part of the Initial Accreditation and Reaccreditation processes. Annual Reports are also submitted via Weave.

In Weave, each Benchmark or Key Indicator will have its own individual "workspace" with an area for evidence uploads and for narrative response.

Tips for writing an SER:

- Use your last SER as a starting point/reference. Be sure to update the response based on what has changed at your school and what the standards/benchmarks/demonstrations are asking for at this submission.
- Prepare ahead of time by picking one standard or a handful of benchmarks each month and writing a response. Be sure to give yourself ample time to do this- there are up to ten standards which equate to around 90 benchmarks at varying levels of complexity. For reference, see the FSA Assessments available on the Information for Financial Aid Professionals (IFAP) website as an example for how this sort of preparation is done in the Title IV world.

Reports Currently Submitted Via Email

The following must be submitted via email to your school's assigned MEAC Accreditation Coordinator: TRAC Reports, Monitoring Reports, Compliance Reports, and Substantive Change Applications.



TRAC, Monitoring and Compliance Reports are currently open ended. The school must decide how it will write each. In general, it helps to list the benchmark and benchmark language before responding to it. Some schools choose to also include a summary of MEAC's findings that led to the report. Some schools have mirrored MEAC's Board Report format when submitting these reports. At this time, MEAC does not have specific requirements for what format these reports must follow.

Substantive Change Applications resemble an SER and must be completed in a similar manner (narrative following the demonstration language with reference to any appendices that follow the standard it applies to). With Substantive Change Applications, you may receive a Materials and Information Request as a part of the review process. These additional pieces will also need to be prepared and submitted via email.

With TRAC Reports- there is room for some back and forth between your school and your school's assigned MEAC Accreditation Coordinator. This back and forth may occur via live meeting (phone or virtual meeting) and/or via email.

With Monitoring Reports- you may receive a Materials Request if there are pieces missing from the submission. These additional pieces will also need to be prepared and submitted via email.

With Compliance Reports- what you submit by the deadline is considered the final submission. MEAC must move forward with that, no matter how adequate or inadequate the submission is.

Specific Note on Reporting

When you have reporting assigned, it is important to look at which program the reporting has been assigned for. When responding to benchmarks during a comprehensive review, each program must be distinctly reported on.

If you offer a certificate as well as a degree, several different degrees, or a campus-based and a distance option, each is considered a separate program for accreditation purposes and will need to be reported on accordingly.

If you offer a program at multiple locations (more than one campus), each location is also considered a separate program and will also need to be reported on accordingly.