

Writing the Assurance Argument: the 5 Criteria and Core Components

The Assurance Argument is arranged into 5 Criteria, each of which will be determined to be Met, Met with Concerns, or Not Met. In the Assurance Argument, each Criterion is broken down into a set of Core Components. The Argument is made by addressing (writing to) each Core Component. Standards of Met, Met with Concerns, and Not Met are addressed at the Core Component level. There are a total of 21 Core Components (across all 5 Criteria).

1. If *ANY* (1 or more) Core Component within a Criterion is “Not Met” or “Met with Concerns” *the entire Criterion* is “Not Met” or “Met with Concerns”
2. If there is no evidence, or we simply ‘don’t have’ something, *acknowledge it* and move on (do bring it to the immediate attention of the Accreditation Team)
3. A Core Component may be “Met” even if there is little/no evidence, *as long as* the institution is aware, has created a reasonable plan of action, **and** *has taken concrete steps* to address it (demonstrated progress)

Writing Strategies

- Review 2008 self-study/HLC feedback/relevant documents for past areas of strengths/concerns
- Write to your audience – Peer Reviewers/HLC; guide them (hold their hand) through your argument, e.g. headings that include Core Component language, etc.
- Evidence is paramount and falls primarily into 2 categories: Evidence of a process; evidence that the process is applied consistently
- Indicate links to evidence *as you write*:
 - Insert document file name and/or link in parentheses
 - Highlight insertion
 - Complete online document/link submission form
- In the final version, we will be able to cross-reference across Criteria – ongoing communication regarding content across Criteria is key
- As we move to completion we can combine linked documents into larger, master documents – e.g. instead of multiple links to multiple syllabi, we can put all syllabi in one document and link to varied locations within the document

Hallmarks of Most Effective Arguments – Identified by Peer Reviewers

1. Strong Opener
 - Connect to the Core Component
 - Make a claim, state the facts that characterize the institution – avoid descriptions
 - Link to supporting evidence
2. Concise Argument
 - Focus on strengths that support the argument
 - Balance strengths with needs/opportunities for improvement
 - Be consistent with the argument; don’t get sidetracked
 - Build logic with the overall argument
3. Claims are Supported with Evidence
 - Choose wisely (not too many) – consider amount, relevancy, redundancy
 - Use data, quotes, examples
 - Links provide background, they don’t make the argument
4. Consider the Audience
 - Peer Review/HLC – what do they need to know?
 - Provide clear outline and language to “walk them through” the argument
5. Summary Statement Pulls it all Together
 - Link to the Criteria and Core Component
 - Integrate past, present and future considerations