

IDC Writing About Data Checklist

The *Writing About Data Checklist* provides a guide for state Part B data managers, SPP/APR coordinators, and other state staff to use when writing about data. When explaining data in the SPP/APR or visualizing data in a table, there are best practices to follow to ensure that the writer is presenting the data clearly and providing appropriate context. This checklist contains sections on pre-writing, data descriptions, and visualizations and provides pointed questions about the text to assist with adding clarity when writing.

Pre-Writing

Before writing, consider the data, the goals of the narrative, and the audience. The table below provides space to organize your thoughts about the goals of the presentation, where that data will come, and how the audience will use the data.

| Pre-writing reflection | Notes | Pre-writing reflection | Notes |
|---|-------|--|-------|
| What is the goal of presenting this data? (e.g., stakeholder engagement, public report card) | | What is the format for presenting the data? | |
| Who is the audience for this data? | | Does the audience have background information about the data? (e.g., Does the audience generally understand acronyms you use? Does the audience know where data come from? Is the audience familiar with statistical methods?) | |
| What is the topic of the text? | | Is there additional context the audience needs to understand this topic? | |
| What is the data source? | | Are this qualitative or quantitative data? | |
| What message are you conveying? | | How can you connect the audience to this message? | |

| Pre-writing reflection | Notes | Pre-writing reflection | Notes |
|---|-------|--|-------|
| What are the equity considerations for this data? | | Do you have biases that might affect your writing? (<i>Consider how biases may impact the text.</i>) | |
| What questions do these data address? | | Have you phrased the critical/essential question to make sure you haven't stated it negatively? | |

Data Descriptions

Data descriptions include SPP/APR and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) written responses, papers, and other text descriptions of datasets. Some considerations for planning texts and reviewing data descriptions include the following:

| Considerations | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| When writing about a demographic category (such as race/ethnicity), did you address each variable? | |
| Does a sentence with a percentage in it clearly state what that percentage refers to? | |
| Did you address what you were expected to address? | |
| Does the text help people understand the data? | |
| Does the text address action steps from results when it applies? | |
| Does this text describe what happened? | |
| Does this text describe what needs to happen? | |
| Does this description provide context for what you are examining through data? | |
| Is there appropriate context for the data itself? | |
| Did you include the count and description of the whole population to provide context? | |
| Is there a description of the calculations you used for the data? | |

Visualizations

Data visualizations can be very clear, but sometimes they do not include all necessary context for the presented data. When using a visualization, consider finding a way to include the following in a description.

| Considerations | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| Is there a title for the visualization? | |
| What data is the visualization showing? (<i>Consider labels, school year, and measurements of data.</i>) | |
| How is it showing the data? | |
| How did you collect the data? What is the source? | |
| Is the purpose for showing the data clear? | |
| Does the visualization illuminate the message? | |
| Are you using tables and visualizations as a guideline? | |

Reviewing

After writing, complete a review to make sure your writing is clear and to ensure data use is effective for your audience. Here are some considerations.

| Considerations | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| Is the writing clear and concise? | |
| Is the tone warm and enthusiastic? | |
| Are there acronyms where there shouldn't be? (<i>Spell out acronyms at first use.</i>) | |
| Is there jargon that you could take out? | |
| Does it use an active voice? | |
| Are there unnecessary words? Is the text concise? | |
| Did you write percentages in a way that is consistent? | |
| Did you use the terms percentage or percentage point correctly? | |
| Is the final document 508 compliant? | |
| If this is an electronic document, are links active and up to date? | |
| Did you write results with an Equity lens? | |
| Is language direct? (<i>e.g., avoid words such as "may," "generally," "like," "diverse"</i>) | |