

TIPS “FROM THE TRENCHES”

(Note: This is a collection of tips from experienced evaluators. They do not constitute NACCAS policy and you are not required to use them, but they show ideas and techniques that have helped other evaluators conduct effective visits. Use them if you find them useful and, if you have any that have worked especially well for you, tell us about them – we’ll include them here and share them with others!)

1. Ask for a current catalog, contract, and course outline before observing academic learning. These documents may have been revised by the institution since it submitted the ISS and you may have a chance to skim through these while observing academic learning.
2. Before going into the school, review the interview guides in preparing for personal interviews.
3. Work on documented items first because the documentation reviewed may point to other areas which will need special attention. For example, student attendance records may indicate a problem with tracking hours which may have to be followed up on during interviews.
4. Select students for interviews yourself. Don’t interview only those students who ask to be interviewed or only the ones selected by the school.
5. Visit or call salons and/or other businesses in the area to find out their opinions of the school and the students.
6. While you are on the morning tour of the school facilities, make as many observations and notes as possible. For example, you can check whether or not the fire extinguishers have been inspected.
7. Ask the school for a copy of the state regulations. This will provide useful information when checking school and instructor licenses, requirements for curriculum, graduation and licensure, as well as other areas.
8. Plan your strategy for conducting the visit before you arrive at the school. This will enable you to get started right away and you will not waste time trying to come up with a plan after you are already there.
9. Prepare for the visit. Thoroughly review the school’s self-study and be familiar with its objectives, policies and procedures. You should also have an understanding of the school’s organizational structure and the background of its staff members (from staff questionnaires).
10. Present your findings, in general, to the school personnel as you go. Keeping the school personnel apprised of your findings will ensure understanding and prevent communication problems later on.
11. When conducting special visits, remain open-minded and remember that you may not find any problems. For example, in a complaint investigation, you may find evidence that the allegations are not true. However, you could also find unexpected problems in areas other than those that led to the special visit.
12. Check the entire attendance process.
 - a. What is the original record of entry? (e.g. Time clock, sign-in sheets, roll call, etc.)
 - b. How is the attendance summarized from the “original record of entry”? Who does this task? Is it completed accurately?
 - c. What is done with attendance in terms of reports to the state, for NACCAS, for financial aid disbursements, refunds, etc.? Are these records accurate?
 - d. Check the hours recorded for each day. Does the starting time, less the ending time, less lunch break equal the amount of clock hours credited to the student (Look for the “50 minute hour”)?
 - e. Do attendance patterns meet the “laugh test” (Is anyone ever absent or does anyone leave early)?

13. Ask yourself: "How close to reality is the visit day?" Are the number of employees present on the day of the visit reasonable in terms of the size of the school and the number of students enrolled? How aware are they of school policies and procedures? Check employee names on enrollment agreements and attendance records against who is present on the day of the visit. When interviewing staff, ask them how long they have worked at the school location. Also ask how many hours a week they work at each school location (for multiple schools under the same ownership).
14. Consider evening programs offered by the school. Do the evening classes operate like the day classes?
15. Check to see if the staff has consistent interpretations of school's policies. Do all of the instructors understand school policies, or just the administrator/owner?
16. Use the file review grid sheets provided when evaluating student files to ensure consistent review.
17. Ask the owner of the school to assist you by indicating who to speak to on specific areas such as counseling, placement information, admissions, etc.
18. Try to remember the names of school staff members. This helps build rapport with the staff and puts them at ease.
19. Start reviewing the school's satisfactory progress policy and its implementation as early as possible.
20. Be aware of socioeconomic factors that may affect the school.
21. If the school offers scholarships, be sure to review its policy and be aware of possible effects on refunds for students who do not complete the program.
22. Stay in constant communication with the other team members.
23. Prepare a list of questions and concerns after reviewing the school's institutional self-study.
24. Conduct a couple of interviews early during the visit to get "a feel" for the school.
25. Check the staff questionnaires to determine the length of time staff members have been with the school. Staff members who have been with the school for a long period of time should be able to answer a lot of questions and should have a good understanding of its policies and procedures.
26. Write up limitations as they are found. This will save time writing the Team Report, and the limitations may be modified or altered later in the day if necessary. Be open-minded. Remember that you could be wrong. Stick to the facts.
27. Bring your own refund calculation sheet to assist you in checking the accuracy of the school's calculations.
28. Meet back with the team around mid-morning to regroup and compare findings.
29. If the school has prepared materials or compiled documentation for the team to review that are current and actually reflect what is done at the school, use them!
30. Show respect for the work of the teacher during your observation of classroom instruction by following the class attentively and staying for a good portion of the class, if you can't stay for the whole session.
31. Be a team player.
- 32. Be prepared for anything and SMILE!**