



Approaching the Writing

Here I want to emphasize 3 aspects of writing professional narratives that relate to something other than actually writing sentences:

- Managing Your Files
- Organizing Your Narrative by Criteria and
- Populating Your Draft with Notes

First, managing your files:

Creating a robust dossier requires managing many documents—and many drafts of key documents, such as your professional statements.

Please be kind to yourself. always, always have a saved draft to fall back on when working on your professional narratives. Please do not place yourself at the mercy of some software’s instability.

An easy way to make sure you have a recent draft in reserve is simply to rename your file—increment the version number—every time you open it to work on it.

My system is this. When I start drafting a document, as the last part of the file name I put v0a. The next time I open the file to work on it, the first thing I do, before adding anything, is to save it as v0b. The next time, v0c.

When I am getting ready to share the draft with someone else, I re-name the file as v1a. When I revise it after receiving their suggestions, I save it as v1b.

As I look at files in a folder on my computer, by simply scanning the version numbers and letter increments, I can see how many times the document has had an “airing”—been viewed by someone

outside my own head—and how many times I’ve revised it after each “airing.”

When the directory begins to get cluttered with versions, I place the older ones in a folder called archive.

You can create an approach to version management that fits you. However you choose to do it, incrementing versions of your files is a sanity-saving practice.

Files can become corrupted, we can misplace them by saving them to the wrong directories, and software can let us down. When you are working on a high-stakes document, always, always, have a recent version on which to fall back.

Okay, so you have opened a new file to start drafting your first professional statement and saved it as version something. It’s blank.

Create the structure for your writing by organizing your narrative by criteria.

Type major headings of the statement, one for each criterion for which you must provide evidence. If a criterion has multiple dimensions, create subheadings for each of those.

Create a heading for your Summary at the end.

Then I recommend that you actually quote The Document’s language for the standard at the beginning of each criterion section. That might be like section such-and-such states that a candidate for tenure must demonstrate ... open quotes...“effectiveness in teaching. Effectiveness means teaching that is rigorous, well-organized, ...” whatever.

This language is your friend. It reminds both reviewers and you of the specific level of performance relevant for *this* criterion and how that criterion is defined by the Document.

Leave some blank lines between each heading and subheading in your draft.

In these blank spaces, you can begin populating your draft with notes.

Type reminders of data you want to include, evidence you can draw on, maybe key phrases that you want to place into a sentence that will appear there later. Just fill some of the blank lines in each section with thoughts relevant to that criterion.

If you cannot think of anything to type, try writing “Here is where I...” Here is where I summarize the contribution of that JMI article. Here is where I address the low student evaluations for the strategy seminar two years ago.

You don’t need to actually do the summarizing, or the addressing, now. Just make notes.

There. You have started. Save your file and close it.

When you come back to it later, today or tomorrow, after you Increment that file name, pick one section and choose one of your notes and make that note into a sentence, or a paragraph. Then do

another one.

By the time you have completed your draft, each section will start with the language of the standard you must meet for that criterion and remind the reader of how that criterion is defined by this academic unit.

Each section will have sentences and paragraphs describing evidence relevant to that criterion.

And each section will end with a statement like this: The evidence summarized here indicates that my teaching has—use the language of the standard—demonstrating that I meet or exceed the standard for effectiveness (or excellence—whatever the standard is for that review).

This approach eventually manifests in a tidy, purposeful—and powerful—statement focused on your contributions to the university and how those relate to the standards of the criteria you are meeting.