

Message Development and Report Writing (8 hours)

Course Overview

Turning audit work into a finely honed, effective message can be a challenge for audit teams and reviewers. For audit teams, it may be difficult to discern the most critical findings and evidence, which then complicates reviewers' efforts to understand a potential message and provide feedback. Because report findings must be communicated clearly and on time to be useful to agencies and policy makers, not having a strong report message before starting to draft the report creates confusion, time delays, and frustration for both the writer and reader. This course provides guidance, tools, and techniques to help audit teams efficiently develop and communicate sound messages that meet standards, are clear to reviewers, and facilitate the development of a high-quality report. This course is offered over 2 half-days.

CPEs: 8

Who Should Attend

Both new and seasoned auditors in team leader or team member roles will gain knowledge and new perspectives about (1) the stages of message development, (2) tools and techniques for developing findings, and (3) writing principles for effectively communicating audit results.

Course Objectives

Participants will be able to

- Understand how the audit objective(s) and findings shape the report message
- Follow the stages of message development
- Identify and assess the message emerging from the data
- Work effectively with stakeholders in the audit organization to reach agreement on the report message
- More effectively communicate audit results in written reports

Course Topics

Establishing a Solid Foundation

- Characteristics of a quality audit report
- Elements of a finding
 - Criteria, condition, cause, and effect
- Relationship of audit questions/objectives to message development

Moving from Data to Message: Four Stages

- Stage 1: Audit planning and audit objectives
 - Audit objectives as researchable questions
 - Types of researchable questions
 - Design matrix as a planning tool

- Stage 2: Evidence gathering and developing findings
 - Four useful techniques for developing findings, including periodic reviews and writing on walls
- Stage 3: Assessing message soundness
 - Sufficiency and appropriateness
 - Corroborating evidence
 - Professional skepticism
 - Linking findings to recommendations
- Stage 4: Developing a message-oriented outline and reaching message agreement
 - Linkages
 - Right level of detail
 - Stakeholder needs

Communicating Audit Results

- Guiding principles for drafting
- How to write five common report components, including an executive summary/Highlights page, findings sections, and conclusions
- Five readability techniques, including deductive structure and consistent terminology
- Techniques to check for clear report linkages