**Exercise 1:   
How a Convincing Message Supports Recommendations**

**Instructions**

Read the report paragraph excerpts below individually. What do you think the recommendation should be?.

**1st Draft**

Our review determined that the agency in calendar years 2020 and 2021 took an average of 8.4 months to process the 1,046 sampled claims. This processing time extended from the time that the agency first received a formal claim (form 2973 submission) until the agency issued its "Letter of Determination" to the claimant. Based upon our previous claims processing work at other agencies, we, too, believe that this is an excessive processing time, and that steps should be taken to shorten the processing time.

Based on the draft paragraph above, write a one-sentence recommendation.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**2nd Draft**

Our review determined that the agency in calendar years 2020 and 2021 took an average of 8.4 months to process the 1,046 sampled disability claims. This processing time extended from the time that the agency first received a formal claim (form 2973 submission) until the agency issued its "Letter of Determination" to the claimant. The agency's average processing time exceeded by about 3 months the private insurance industry average for similar cases, and by 1.6 months the state average of the five states we visited.

Unlike the private insurance companies and five states, the agency has not adopted an "integrated case management" (ICM) approach and acquired the technology needed to fully integrate key databases. These steps have allowed the insurance industry and five states to reduce processing time by about 1 to 2 months.

Based on the two draft paragraphs, write a one-sentence recommendation.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**3rd Draft**

Our review determined that the agency in calendar years 2020 and 2021 took an average of 8.4 months to process the 1,046 sampled disability claims. The agency's average processing time exceeded by about 3 months the private insurance industry average for similar cases, and by 1.6 months the state average of the five states we visited.

Unlike the private insurance companies and five states, the agency has not adopted an "integrated case management" (ICM) approach and acquired the computer technology needed to fully integrate key databases. These steps have allowed the insurance industry and five states to reduce processing time by about 1 to 2 months while employing fewer claims processors. We estimate that if the agency adopted the ICM approach and leased the required computer technology, it could achieve a similar processing time reduction at a net annual savings of about $20 million.

Based on the two draft paragraphs, write a one-sentence recommendation.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

[Blank Page]

**Exercise 2: Assessing the Effectiveness of an Outline**

**Instructions**

In your groups, review the outline below. Then assess the strength of the outline in the 4 areas below. Select a spokesperson to summarize your group’s discussion for the class.

1. How well does the outline identify the main points of the findings?
2. How well does the outline present the findings in the most logical order?
3. How well does the outline connect the findings to each other to tell a story?
4. How well does the outline link the findings to the conclusions and recommendations?

**Objective of the Analysis**

*Determine the effectiveness of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) in decreasing the number of fatalities on rural roads versus urban roads.*

**1st Message Statement (Section Heading)**

**FHWA Has Not Taken Sufficient Actions to Reduce the Causes of Higher Fatalities on Rural Roads**

Supporting Message Statements (Subsections)

* Over the last 10 years, fatalities on rural roads have exceeded those on urban roads by 25 percent, even though the total number of rural road miles is about equal to the total number of urban road miles.
* Colorado has the largest number of rural road miles among the 50 states.
* Arkansas has the largest number of rural road fatalities among the 50 states.
* NHTSA’s grant process allows states a wide degree of flexibility in how to use highway safety funds on rural or urban roads.
* FHWA funding for rural roads is based on old 2008 data on rural versus urban road miles, when there were only half as many rural road miles as urban road miles.
* FHWA seeks to provide adequate funding to reduce highway fatalities on both urban and rural roads.

**2nd Message Statement (Section Heading)**

**NHTSA Is Limited in Actions It Can Take**

Supporting Message Statements (Subsections)

* NHTSA is required by law to reduce the specific causes of fatalities in an equal way on both rural and urban roads.
* More rural roads are in states not requiring use of safety belts, compared to urban roads. (It is up to each state whether to require the use of safety belts.)
* More rural road miles are farther from hospitals, compared to urban road miles.

**Recommendation**

*NHTSA should analyze how to specify to states the use of highway safety funds to decrease fatalities equally on both rural and urban roads.*

**Exercise 3: Writer-Based vs Reader-Based Writing**

# Instructions

# Read the following table. Which column is more understandable? Why?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Writer-Based** | **Reader-Based** |
| **Objective 1** | What are women’s demographic and labor force characteristics, including their rate of Social Security and pension coverage, how do they fare in the current Social Security and employer-based pension programs, and what is the rate of poverty? | How does the retirement income of women compare with that of men? |
| **Finding 1 Heading 1** | Longevity and Financial Resources Vary by Gender | Women Have Less Retirement Income than Men Largely Due to Labor Force Participation and Lifetime Earnings |
| **Finding 1 Charge Paragraph First Sentences** | Mortality rates and Social Security income and pension income differ significantly by gender. But no matter the rates, gender differences remain. | Women have less retirement income than men because of differences in labor force participation, earnings, Social Security, and pensions. Women are therefore more likely than men to be below the poverty threshold in retirement. |

[Blank Page]

**Exercise 4: Deductive Writing**

**Instructions**

Order the following statements using the deductive approach (numbers are for instructional purposes only).

**Objective of the Analysis**

***Assess the extent to which GSA has implemented federally mandated IT management practices.***

1. We attribute the IT deficiencies to the GSA Chief Information Officer’s limited authority to manage IT assets agency-wide, as well as to a decentralized resource allocation approach that hinders funding for the centralized IT environment.
2. The IT deficiencies are not new and were reported in prior Office of Inspector General audits throughout the last 13 years.
3. Specifically, GSA has not established an IT strategic plan, architecture, or governance framework to facilitate day-to-day management of its aging IT systems and equipment.
4. GSA has not implemented federally mandated IT management practices essential for effective oversight of its IT environment.
5. Continuation of this approach impedes budgeting for long-term IT enhancements, leads to overspending, and causes unnecessary IT support efforts.

[Blank Page]

**Exercise 5: Developing a Message-Oriented Outline**

**Instructions**

Review the information below individually. Then, in your groups, identify the message statement(s) and key supporting points for at least one of the below findings given the objective of the analysis: Write your statements on your flip chart and select a spokesperson to summarize your work for the class.

# Objective of the Analysis

# How effective is the HUD Real Estate Assessment Center’s (REAC) contractor inspection program?

**Overall Background Information**

* Over 2 million low- and moderate-income households live in HUD-assisted (subsidized) or insured multifamily housing.
* HUD’s Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) uses contractor inspectors to inspect the physical condition of these properties to determine whether they are decent, safe, sanitary, and in good repair.
* Contract inspectors must complete and pass each of 3 phases of the training program: 6-week on-line training, 2-week in-class training, and 1-week field training.
* REAC uses federal employee quality assurance inspectors to monitor and review contract inspections.

**Finding 1**

The intent of the REAC contractor inspection application process is to weed out those applicants who lack sufficient inspection experience. The contract inspection application requires that candidates have conducted a minimum of 250 residential or commercial inspections and possess knowledge of building construction.

However, REAC staff found that a number of contract inspectors did not have the inspection experience needed to apply the Uniform Physical Condition Standards. REAC does not require documentation from the contract inspector applicants that they successfully completed 250 inspections.

During 2019 and 2020, due to a downturn in applications for contract inspectors, REAC reduced the applicants’ required number of inspections from 250 to 50.

As a result, REAC’s analysis of quality assurance inspections data show that from 2016 to 2021, 27 percent of REAC’s quality assurance reviews rated the contract inspections below the minimum REAC physical inspection standards. This could impact over 500,000 of the total 2 million households living in HUD-assisted (subsidized) or insured multifamily housing.

**Finding 2**

We found that REAC does not have formal metrics or use data to track the effectiveness of each of the 3 phases of training. REAC officials told us that they have not developed formal training metrics or analyzed training data because they were not aware of any problems, and they lack staff to perform such analysis.

Leading private-sector organizations have developed processes to systematically track the cost and delivery of specific training and measure the effectiveness of those training efforts in increasing employees’ skills, and identify any improvements needed.

Without analyzing the effectiveness of the different phases of training, REAC lacks assurance that inspectors are sufficiently trained and information on what improvements are needed.

**Finding 3**

REAC’s quality assurance inspectors are to conduct physical inspections of properties inspected to ensure contractor inspections meet standards. However, REAC has not met management targets for the number and timeliness of its quality assurance reviews of contract inspections. REAC officials told us they did not meet their targets due to a shortage of quality assurance inspectors. In addition, some quality assurance inspectors told us that the guidance was unclear on the number and timeframes for performing reviews of contractor inspections and allowed for the quality assurance inspector’s judgment.

As a result, REAC is missing opportunities to timely identify patterns of low-quality inspections and take actions to coach or remove contract inspectors.

**Exercise 6: Assessing Paragraph Coherence**

Instructions

Read the paragraph below individually *(The numbers are for instructional purposes only).*

(1)State policies—which govern provider reporting requirements and data sharing—in effect prior to the emergency enabled Medicaid programs in four selected states to obtain patient-level vaccination data from state immunization information systems. (2) This was because providers administering COVID-19 vaccinations were required to report to them. (3) In contrast, state policies in effect prior to the emergency in two selected states either did not specify or did not permit such data exchange. (4) Six selected state Medicaid programs GAO reviewed varied in their ability to obtain data on beneficiaries with COVID-19 vaccinations from state immunization information systems during the COVID-19 public health emergency from 2020-2023. (5)During the emergency, these systems—maintained by state public health departments—were the primary source of such data.

Let’s discuss the following questions:

1. Is there a topic sentence that focuses the paragraph? If so, is it an effective topic sentence? Why or why not?
2. Does every sentence in the paragraph clearly and directly support the topic sentence?
3. Is the paragraph coherent? Do the sentences clearly and logically flow from one to another?
4. What devices, if any, has the writer used to help readers move smoothly from sentence to sentence?

[Blank Page]

[Blank Page]

**Exercise 7: Reviewing a Draft Product**

**Instructions**

Individually review the draft product excerpt and mark up the document with the revisions that you think are needed.

***Draft Report Excerpt***

Before 1979, the United States enjoy good relations with the Iranian government and exported military equipment to Iran. However, U.S.-Iraq relations deteriorated sharply following the 1979 Iranian revolution and the consequences seizure of U.S. embassy personnel. In this report, we assess extent to which (1) U.S. trade statistics accurately depict U.S. exports to Iran, (2) Treasury licenses U.S. exports to Iran in compliance with the trade restrictions and provides complete and timely licensing data to enforcement agencies and Congress, and (3) Iran obtains U.S. military and dual-use items through **illegal** transshipments. Consequently, U.S. exports to Iran are severely restricted by U.S. laws and regulations, and the United States have banned the export of most U.S. goods to Iran without an expirt license issued by the Department of the Treasury.

**Results in Brief**

U.S. trade statistic for exports to Iran include goods that exported to other countries, such as Ireland/Iraq. Iran was mis-identified as the recipient country in the statistics because of export data filing errors that Census Bureau (Census) did not detect or correct because of the low dollar value of the export transactions. However, accuracy, of the Iran export statistics is important; because the United States has severely restricted trade with Iraq as a state sponsor of terrorism. Census officials stated that, as a result of our review, they have initiated manual check of new filings of exports to Iran, required filers of export data to select recipient countries from a list instead of allowing them to enter a two-letter international standard country code, and began posting newly-detected corrections to Iran export data on a Census Web page. Census officials told us that they were optimistic that these actions would provide more accurate U.S. trade statistics for Iran.

Treasury's two, paper-based information systems are not integrate with one another, and cannot be searched to identify licenses for the export of goods to Iran. For example, Treasury was unable to respond to a 2019 requests from CBP officials for complete and timely Iran licensing data CBP officials stated that they sought the information to help CBP inspectors verify that goods at U.S. ports had been properly licensed for export to Iran. A random sample of approximately 58 licenses drawn from 1,833 agricultural and medical export licenses issued from late to mid-2019 disclosed that the sampled licenses were consistent with U.S. export regulations related to agricultural and medical items.

We also determined that Treasury had complied with legal restrictions applicable to licensing the export of dual-use technology to insure the safety of civil aviation and safe operation of U.S.-origin commercial aircraft. However, we identified weaknesses in Treasury's ability to retrieve and provide timely information about its licensing decisions. Because Treasury administers the U.S. sanctions program on Iran, its inability to provide complete and timely information on export licenses undermines the U.S. government's ability to assess compliance with the sanctions. Treasury plans to *upgrade its licensing information system* for agricultural and medical exports to Iran, which are permitted by U.S. law. However, the upgrade would not include import licenses for other types of dual-use goods, such as civilian aircraft equipment with potential military applications. Treasury did not specify when similar upgrades would be implemented to track these other types of dual-use items.

Goods involved in cases of actual or attempted smuggling include parts for Iran's U.S.-built fighter aircraft, military helicopters, and air defense systems; night vision equipment; submachine guns; computers; laboratory equipment; specialized steel; pumps with nuclear applications; and electronic components for missiles. Criminal cases handled by the Justice Department indicate that U.S. goods are often shipped illegally to Iran through the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, or Singapore. To address the problem, U.S. agencies have conducted investigations to uncover Iranian procurement networks and prosecuted at least 30 firms and individuals during 2017 through September 2019.

**Conclusions**

In 2018, the US media cited government statistics in reporting that US firms were illegally transshipping goods to Iran. The statistics are maintained by Census and are based on data filed by exporters or their agents. The U.S. government's official statistics for U.S. exports to Iran erroneously include goods that were exported to countries other than Iran. These statistics indicate that U.S. exporters shipped a total of 278 different types of goods to Iran from 2014 to 2018. Treasury is issuing export licenses for Iran in accordance with export regulations but cannot provide complete licensing information because illegally transshipping U.S. goods through third-party countries is inherently difficult to detect.

**Recommendation for Executive Action**

The Census Bureau should take steps to detect and correct errors in its statistics to help ensure that U.S. agencies have complete and reliable access to data concerning licensed U.S. exports to Iran.

**Exercise 9:  
Reviewing a Draft Product Using Structured Reading**

**Instructions**

Review the following draft report except using the structured reading technique.

***Draft Report Excerpt***

Before 1979, the United States enjoy good relations with the Iranian government and exported military equipment to Iran. However, U.S.-Iraq relations deteriorated sharply following the 1979 Iranian revolution and the consequences seizure of U.S. embassy personnel. In this report, we assess extent to which (1) U.S. trade statistics accurately depict U.S. exports to Iran, (2) Treasury licenses U.S. exports to Iran in compliance with the trade restrictions and provides complete and timely licensing data to enforcement agencies and Congress, and (3) Iran obtains U.S. military and dual-use items through **illegal** transshipments. Consequently, U.S. exports to Iran are severely restricted by U.S. laws and regulations, and the United States have banned the export of most U.S. goods to Iran without an expirt license issued by the Department of the Treasury.

**Results in Brief**

U.S. trade statistic for exports to Iran include goods that exported to other countries, such as Ireland/Iraq. Iran was mis-identified as the recipient country in the statistics because of export data filing errors that Census Bureau (Census) did not detect or correct because of the low dollar value of the export transactions. However, accuracy, of the Iran export statistics is important; because the United States has severely restricted trade with Iraq as a state sponsor of terrorism. Census officials stated that, as a result of our review, they have initiated manual check of new filings of exports to Iran, required filers of export data to select recipient countries from a list instead of allowing them to enter a two-letter international standard country code, and began posting newly-detected corrections to Iran export data on a Census Web page. Census officials told us that they were optimistic that these actions would provide more accurate U.S. trade statistics for Iran.

Treasury's two, paper-based information systems are not integrate with one another, and cannot be searched to identify licenses for the export of goods to Iran. For example, Treasury was unable to respond to a 2019 requests from CBP officials for complete and timely Iran licensing data CBP officials stated that they sought the information to help CBP inspectors verify that goods at U.S. ports had been properly licensed for export to Iran. A random sample of approximately 58 licenses drawn from 1,833 agricultural and medical export licenses issued from late to mid-2019 disclosed that the sampled licenses were consistent with U.S. export regulations related to agricultural and medical items.

We also determined that Treasury had complied with legal restrictions applicable to licensing the export of dual-use technology to insure the safety of civil aviation and safe operation of U.S.-origin commercial aircraft. However, we identified weaknesses in Treasury's ability to retrieve and provide timely information about its licensing decisions. Because Treasury administers the U.S. sanctions program on Iran, its inability to provide complete and timely information on export licenses undermines the U.S. government's ability to assess compliance with the sanctions. Treasury plans to *upgrade its licensing information system* for agricultural and medical exports to Iran, which are permitted by U.S. law. However, the upgrade would not include import licenses for other types of dual-use goods, such as civilian aircraft equipment with potential military applications. Treasury did not specify when similar upgrades would be implemented to track these other types of dual-use items.

Goods involved in cases of actual or attempted smuggling include parts for Iran's U.S.-built fighter aircraft, military helicopters, and air defense systems; night vision equipment; submachine guns; computers; laboratory equipment; specialized steel; pumps with nuclear applications; and electronic components for missiles. Criminal cases handled by the Justice Department indicate that U.S. goods are often shipped illegally to Iran through the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, or Singapore. To address the problem, U.S. agencies have conducted investigations to uncover Iranian procurement networks and prosecuted at least 30 firms and individuals during 2017 through September 2019.

**Conclusions**

In 2018, the US media cited government statistics in reporting that US firms were illegally transshipping goods to Iran. The statistics are maintained by Census and are based on data filed by exporters or their agents. The U.S. government's official statistics for U.S. exports to Iran erroneously include goods that were exported to countries other than Iran. These statistics indicate that U.S. exporters shipped a total of 278 different types of goods to Iran from 2014 to 2018. Treasury is issuing export licenses for Iran in accordance with export regulations but cannot provide complete licensing information because illegally transshipping U.S. goods through third-party countries is inherently difficult to detect.

**Recommendation for Executive Action**

The Census Bureau should take steps to detect and correct errors in its statistics to help ensure that U.S. agencies have complete and reliable access to data concerning licensed U.S. exports to Iran.

**Tips for Reviewing Products Using Structured Reading Techniques**

**Instructions**

Review your partner’s draft report excerpt, applying the following techniques:

1. Read as a Skeptic

* What sorts of things would a skeptic question?
* Is there appropriate tone and balance?

1. Focus on the overall logic flow and linkages (HOCs)

* Does the evidence, conclusions, and recommendation flow from the objective?
* Is the evidence compelling and convincing?
* Are the recommendations supported and appropriate?
* As a reader, do you know what is coming (e.g., are there advance organizers)?

1. Focus on Paragraph Flow and Structure (LOCs)

* Are the findings discussed in the right order?
* Do paragraphs represent a single idea?
* Do paragraphs flow smoothly?
* Are there good topic sentences?
* Is there proper word choice, correct grammar/punctuation and impactful sentences structure?