



Technical Assessor Information and Guidance Document

Issued: August 2022

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1. Introduction

This document has been prepared for NATA Technical Assessors to serve as resource information.

The purpose of the document is threefold:

- to provide background information about NATA;
- to provide information to assist preparing for and participating in assessments;
- to provide guidance on assessment techniques.

The document is to be used in conjunction with the NATA accreditation documents as specified in Section 3.

When appointed as a Technical Assessor, you will be required to attend a complimentary Technical Assessor Development Program (TADP) provided by NATA's Training Services Group (TSG). You will be formally invited to participate in a course when the next one becomes available.

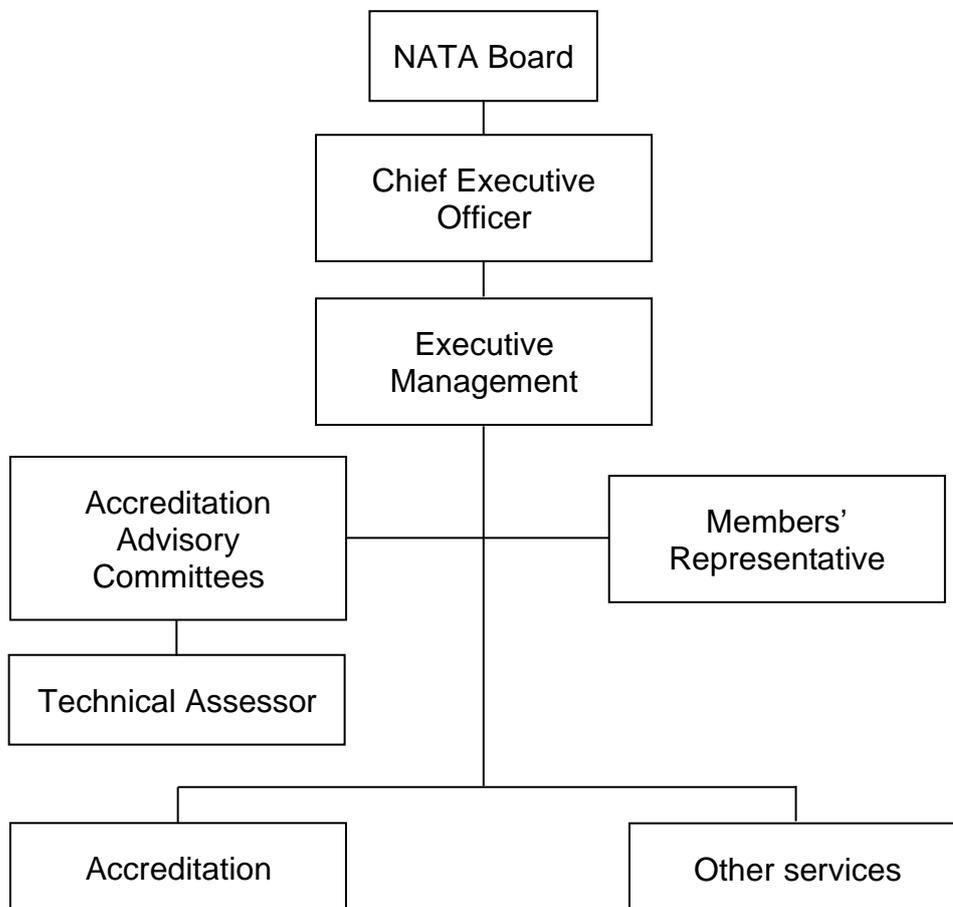
On occasion, you may be invited to participate in an assessment prior to attending a TADP. Should this occur, the NATA Lead Assessor (Accreditation Specialist) leading the assessment will provide you with a briefing beforehand.

It is in NATA's interest to ensure that our Technical Assessors receive appropriate training and resource support. We would therefore be grateful for your feedback on the NATA accreditation documents, or any other matters relating to Technical Assessor development and training.

2. About NATA

Structure of NATA

The overall structure of NATA is shown in the following diagram:



The NATA Board, Advisory Committee members and Technical Assessors provide their services to NATA on an honorary basis.

NATA Board of Directors

NATA is governed by a Board of Directors, drawn from its members and stakeholders and responsible for overseeing all of NATA's activities.

The Board is supported in the day-to-day running of NATA's activities by an Executive Team comprising of the Chief Executive Officer and General Managers.

Accreditation Advisory Committees

The NATA Board receives technical advice from specialist committees that it appoints. These committees are referred to as Accreditation Advisory Committees (AACs). There are a number AACs covering the various activities which NATA accredits. NATA's Sector Managers serve as secretaries to the AACs and are also responsible for the technical oversight of NATA's accreditation programs.

The primary role of the AAC is to provide technical advice for the area of accreditation it covers. In particular, an AAC may be asked to:

- provide guidance on interpretation of the criteria covered by the relevant accreditation Standard and, where necessary, guidance on the development and review of technical accreditation criteria;
- provide technical and strategic advice relevant to industry, including emerging issues which NATA should be made aware of;
- provide advice on technical issues identified at assessments;
- make recommendations in relation to the accreditation status of a facility;
- recommend new technical assessors.

NATA appoints members to an AAC from any interested party following receipt of expressions of interest through a transparent process. The Board is responsible for approving appointments for a defined period based on individuals satisfying the selection criteria.

Technical Assessors

Technical Assessors are selected on the basis of their technical knowledge, expertise and commitment to NATA. They are appointed once the relevant Accreditation Advisory Committee has considered their application following an invitation to join the voluntary panel of assessors.

As a member of an assessment team, the role of the Technical Assessor is to evaluate a facility's technical competence under the guidance of the NATA Lead Assessor.

NATA Lead Assessors

Lead Assessors (Accreditation Specialists) are full-time NATA employees who have been extensively trained to lead assessments.

They are knowledgeable with NATA's assessment processes, the accreditation criteria and serve as the lead for assessment teams. They are responsible for preparing assessment findings, providing guidance to Technical Assessors and follow-up on assessment findings.

NATA's accreditation programs

NATA delivers its accreditation services based on programs. Each program covers a specific standard as defined in the NATA Rules. The following programs are available:

Program	Standard
Biobanking	ISO 20387
Human Pathology	ISO 15189 and NPAAC Standards
Inspection	ISO/IEC 17020
Medical Imaging	RANZCR Standards
Proficiency Testing Scheme Providers	ISO/IEC 17043
Reference Material Producers	ISO 17034
Sleep Disorders Services	ASA Standard for Sleep Disorders Services
Testing and Calibration	ISO/IEC 17025

Memoranda of Understanding

NATA has established a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

The most significant MoU is the one with the Australian Government signed in 1988 and reconfirmed in 2018.

There are other MoUs with various instrumentalities and government departments that are industry specific. Where any of these MoUs have particular relevance to your industry, the NATA Lead Assessor will be aware of the policy issues and will provide guidance as required during an assessment visit.

International activities and Mutual Recognition Arrangements

NATA represents Australia's interests, notably in the development of international standards and support to the Australian Government on the establishment of arrangements dependent on conformity assessment activities, for example, Free Trade Agreements.

In the international accreditation forum, Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) have been established. These govern the acceptance of results from accredited facilities in economies that are signatories to the arrangements. The two arrangements NATA is a signatory of include the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) and Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC).

NATA's competence as an accreditation body is recognised through its signatory status of ILAC and APAC.

The ILAC and APAC websites include a list of the economies and the organisations that are party to the arrangements. The listings are under constant revision as more economies and organisations join the arrangements.

www.ilac.org

www.apac-accreditation.org

All signatories to the MRAs are evaluated periodically against ISO/IEC 17011 *Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies*.

On rare occasions, you may find yourself part of an assessment team being observed by an MRA evaluation team. Should this happen, you will be given guidance and information about what to expect and who will be involved. You should not make any changes to the way you normally participate in a NATA assessment. The evaluation team is there to observe NATA's processes and not to interfere in the outcome of the assessment.

NATA's website and social media platforms

NATA's website (www.nata.com.au) serves as one form of communication with accredited facilities (members) and NATA's Technical Assessors.

NATA also maintains a number of social media platforms.

The website contains a section titled 'About Us' > 'Our Technical Assessors' which contains information of relevance to Technical Assessors. Information about Technical Assessor training sessions can be found under the section titled 'Training'.

The NATA website is where all accreditation criteria and guidance documents can be found.

NATA's website portal

The NATA portal is used to exchange accreditation documentation and provides users with notifications of news and publications (including the accreditation criteria and guidance documents) in their areas of interest. A profile is automatically created for Technical Assessors.

As an interface between the Technical Assessor and NATA the portal allows:

- safe and secure submission of documents;
- the exchange of large sized files outside email;
- details on assessments which you have been appointed;
- notifications to the receiving party when 'job' related documents are uploaded to the portal;
- access to targeted communications, information and publications including email and dashboard notifications of any new or modified NATA publication available via the portal.

By accessing or using the portal, you agree to the Terms and Conditions which can be accessed via the NATA website www.nata.com.au. A reference guide for use of the portal is also available on the website.

3. The accreditation documents

NATA accreditation is based on the evaluation of a facility's technical competence against the criteria specific to each accreditation program. These are detailed in the NATA Accreditation Criteria (NAC) packages available from the NATA website and the NATA portal. Technical Assessors will automatically be subscribed to the relevant NAC package on the portal.

Each NAC includes the following documents:

- General NATA Documents;
- General Accreditation Criteria;
- General Accreditation Guidance;
- Specific Accreditation Criteria;
- Specific Accreditation Guidance;
- General Accreditation Forms;
- Specific Accreditation Forms.

In addition to alignment with an accreditation program, where relevant a NAC is also aligned with a specific industry (e.g. Agribusiness, Food & Beverage, Legal, Materials etc).

Note: The guidance documents included in the NACs do not specifically serve as accreditation criteria.

The General Documents, Criteria, Guidance and Forms are applicable to all accredited and applicant facilities, while the Specific Criteria, Guidance and Forms are applicable to particular industries or discrete technical disciplines.

NATA Procedures for Accreditation

This is an informative document applicable to all accreditation programs and explains NATA's accreditation processes.

The NATA Rules

The Rules take precedence over all other NATA documents and detail NATA's constitution and regulations. They define the conditions for maintaining accreditation and the rights and obligations of NATA members.

Accreditation program standard

The NAC references the relevant ISO or industry standard applicable to the accreditation program.

NATA General Accreditation Criteria (GAC)

These documents describe the general accreditation criteria applicable to an accreditation program and include the relevant Standard Application Document (SAD) (e.g. *ISO/IEC 17025 Standard Application Document*). The SAD provides interpretative criteria and recommendations for the application of the relevant standard.

NATA Specific Accreditation Criteria (SAC)

For particular industries or discrete technical disciplines, NATA additionally publishes SACs and associated Appendices and Annexes where relevant.

NATA General Accreditation Guidance (GAG) and Specific Accreditation Guidance (SAG)

The GAG and SAG documents provide additional guidance which do not serve as accreditation criteria, however provide best practice recommendations. These documents include for example:

- general and reference equipment tables that provide guidance on calibration and checking intervals and the associated procedures;
- documents providing interpretative information to assist facilities in relation to particular technical matters.

NATA General Accreditation Forms and Specific Accreditation Forms

These documents include checklists, worksheets and site notification forms.

Prior to any assessment, you should ensure you have the latest accreditation documents available and are familiar with them.
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4. Technical Assessors

Recognised technical expertise and experience

NATA invites individuals who have the required professional / technical experience and personal qualities to join the panel of Technical Assessors.

Individuals NATA invites may come from, but not limited to:

- academic institutions;
- research establishments;
- public and private facilities engaged in activities NATA accredits.

Technical Assessors are invited on the basis of their:

- professional / technical expertise;
- experience and practical application or familiarisation with the activities NATA accredits;
- where relevant, qualifications;
- personal skills and attributes, for example:
 - ability to critically evaluate;
 - be objective;
 - work as a member of a team;
 - good written, aural and oral communication;
 - ability to maintain confidentiality.
- commitment to NATA and the accreditation process.

Individuals are asked to complete the appropriate form provided by NATA prior to being considered and approved as a Technical Assessor.

This form includes a confidentiality agreement and a list of the activities nominated by the individual which they are competent to assess.

Technical Assessor performance and appointment is reviewed periodically and notably after participation in an assessment. Appointment may be discontinued, for example, due to unsatisfactory performance, breach of confidentiality, etc.

Technical Assessors are requested to actively inform NATA of changes to their personal details (e.g. contact numbers, change of employer, changes to competencies etc). NATA will also periodically request for this information. It is important that you respond to such requests in order for your Technical Assessor status to remain current. Further, keeping these details current assists NATA with assessment team selection.

Technical Assessor Development Program (TADP)

Attendance at a NATA TADP training course is a mandatory aspect of your commitment as a Technical Assessor. The course is general in nature and applicable to all Technical Assessors irrespective of the accreditation program.

The course is scheduled periodically and is provided free of charge (excluding travel and accommodation if they are required).

The course covers:

- the role of the Technical Assessor;
- the role of the NATA Lead Assessor;
- preparation for an assessment;
- conduct of an assessment;
- tips and hints on assessing skills.

On appointment as a Technical Assessor, you will be automatically invited to attend the next TADP course in your locality or via a virtual platform. If you are not able to attend, it is expected you advise NATA so attendance at another session can be scheduled. Should you not attend a TADP within the first 2 years following your appointment your status as a Technical Assessor will be reviewed. Mitigating factors such as provision of TADP sessions in your locality, apologies received from you for not being able to attend an invitation to a course, etc will be considered as part of this review.

TADP course dates and locations are available on the NATA website or by contacting the NATA Training Services Group in the Sydney office.

Experienced Technical Assessors are also welcome to attend a TADP as a refresher by contacting NATA.

A Technical Assessor may be called upon to participate in an assessment before it is possible to attend a TADP. In such cases, the NATA Lead Assessor will provide appropriate guidance and direction.

On occasion, NATA may prescribe additional mandatory training requirements for Technical Assessors.

Time commitment

Technical Assessors are completely free to accept or decline any invitation to participate in an assessment. Prior to accepting an invitation, you should give due consideration to the time necessary.

Generally, Technical Assessors are invited to participate in two to four assessments per year. Most assessments occur over one day, however, some may extend for longer periods dependent on the activities to be reviewed.

Apart from the assessment day, there will be a need to dedicate some time preparing for the assessment. Further, you may also be asked to review a facility's response to specific assessment findings post assessment.

Occasionally you may be asked to travel interstate, to country locations or on the very rare occasion overseas. This will require a greater time commitment.

Conflicts of interest and confidentiality

Potential conflicts of interest must be advised to the NATA Lead Assessor when considering whether to accept an invitation to participate in an assessment. The need for confidentiality in relation to any assessment you participate in is also paramount.

The form completed when first invited to join the assessor panel includes a commitment to declare any conflicts of interest regarding an organisation you may be invited to assess. Examples of conflict of interest include but are not limited to:

- company alliances and commercial interests in a facility;
- commercial arrangements (e.g. client/supplier relations);
- consultancy arrangements (current and/or past);
- close personal associations (family and/or friends).

Prior to NATA confirming your participation in any assessment, you will also be required to again formally declare:

- any conflict of interest with the facility to be assessed;
- compliance with the NATA Rules;
- compliance with NATA's privacy policy;
- to hold all information in relation to the assessment confidential.

During the course of an assessment, if you become aware of any conflict of interest, you are expected to raise this as soon as possible with the NATA Lead Assessor.

When preparing for an assessment, the facility is also given the opportunity to consider all proposed Technical Assessors and to advise NATA of any conflicts of interest.

All information shared with you or obtained relating to an assessment remains strictly confidential.

This includes:

- all arrangements including the name of the facility to be assessed and other Technical Assessors involved;
- briefing documentation provided;
- discussions during the assessment, findings and outcomes;
- information about the facility's operations obtained during the course of the assessment that would otherwise not normally be available to you.

Breaches of confidentiality are viewed very seriously and as a minimum will jeopardise an individual's ongoing participation and recognition as a NATA Technical Assessor.

Some hints for maintaining confidentiality include:

- remembering that all matters and information associated with an assessment is privileged;
- preventing others access to the briefing information provided to you:
 - if held electronically, then ensuring your electronic device is protected (e.g. password protected);
 - if provided in hardcopy, then storing it in a secure location not accessible to others. Be particularly vigilant at airports, whilst travelling to and from an assessment and in your assessment accommodation;
- using the portal as the primary source of information exchange between yourself and NATA;
- keeping your portal log-in details and any other passwords secure. Do not share your passwords with anyone or in any way publish them or write them down. Never send a password through email or reveal over the telephone. Do not let anyone see you type your password;
- avoiding the use of unencrypted email to transfer personally identifiable or sensitive information;
- strictly not discussing any information about the assessment with others;
- during the assessment not removing any hardcopy information or capturing information by electronic means (e.g. photos with mobile phone);
- at the completion of the assessment, deleting information if held electronically on any device or returning any hardcopy briefing information to the NATA Lead Assessor for disposal;

In the event that information security has been compromised inform a member of NATA staff immediately. NATA is committed to ensuring the security of information in its possession. In order to support this commitment an information security management system has been established in accordance with ISO/IEC 27001 *Information Technology - Security techniques - Information security management systems - Requirements*.

Gifts and meals

The acceptance of dining invitations and gifts may be of concern due to potential undue pressure or risks to maintaining impartiality.

The NATA Lead Assessor will provide guidance as to what is acceptable, but the following points are offered:

- dining invitations or gifts can be considered as a gesture of hospitality if offered by a facility;
- under no circumstance should meals and gifts be requested of, or expected of a facility;
- the provision of lunch by the facility is an acceptable time and cost-effective business practice;

- occasionally company souvenirs are provided (e.g. corporate mugs, caps, etc).

Particularly when travelling overseas:

- familiarise yourself with usual business practices and culture as to what is acceptable;
- small gifts may be given as a token of appreciation for your time and effort;
- as a sign of hospitality, facility staff may also offer to take you for evening meals, or on local guided tours during any spare time.

Provided the above are not excessive then they are acceptable. If you are in any way uncomfortable, discuss it with the NATA Lead Assessor or gracefully decline.

Conduct and ethics

As representatives of NATA, Technical Assessors are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and courteous manner and observe the following standards of behaviour:

- comply with all Laws;
- comply with any reasonable (and legal) instruction from NATA;
- be honest and fair in dealings with NATA staff and clients;
- treat others in a non-discriminatory manner with proper regard for their rights and dignity.

If you have any questions or believe you have been exposed to discriminatory or inappropriate behaviour whilst conducting NATA business, please contact the General Manager, Business Services or General Manager, Operations and Technical immediately.

Work health and safety

At NATA we believe that promoting Work Health and Safety is essential if we are to develop an environment where our employees and volunteers feel safe and valued.

It is the responsibility of the NATA Lead Assessor and the Technical Assessor to conduct assessments in accordance with NATA's Work Health and Safety Policies to protect both themselves and others.

Drug and alcohol testing at the workplace has become common practice.

NATA expects assessment team members to be free from the influence of any drugs and alcohol at all times while performing an assessment regardless of the location. This includes while travelling to the facility's premises or NATA.

When conducting an assessment, you are first obligated to comply with the facility's safety requirements. The following should be adhered to at all times:

- sign in and out as per the facility's protocol;
- do not wander around the facility's premises unaccompanied unless your contact person has given permission;
- attend any induction as directed;
- if you recognise any potential hazard, or should a safety incident occur, it must be reported to the facility immediately;
- all requests from the facility's safety / emergency personnel must be followed;
- compliance with the drug, alcohol and-COVID policies and procedures, including the need for testing as directed;
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is to be worn as required.

Apart from complying with the facility's safety requirements for reporting an accident or injury, also bring the matter to the NATA Lead Assessor.

Prior to an assessment, NATA gathers information from the facility in relation to health and safety requirements and Technical Assessors are made aware of these.

If you are unable to comply with any requirement then you should advise the NATA Lead Assessor which may include declining participation in the assessment.

Where drug and/or alcohol testing will be performed, there is no obligation for the results to be disclosed to NATA unless the individual provides consent to do so.

Privacy policy

NATA respects and upholds the rights of individuals to privacy protection under the Australian Privacy Principles contained in the Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection) Act 2012. A copy of NATA’s Privacy Policy can be obtained from the NATA website or by contacting one of the NATA offices. This policy describes how NATA manages the personal information we hold.

The personal information collected from individuals appointed as Technical Assessors will include your name, position, professional qualifications, business address, business telephone and mobile phone numbers, home address, home telephone and personal mobile phone numbers, e-mail address, memberships of professional associations and employment history.

The information may be disclosed to NATA staff and committee members and it may be viewed by auditors as part of Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) evaluations of NATA. All individuals having access to the information have signed confidentiality agreements. The information may also be disclosed to government and regulatory authorities and other organisations, as required or authorised by law and/or with which NATA has a Memorandum of Understanding or similar formal agreement.

From time to time, NATA receives requests from MRA partners for technical experts to assist in their assessments. With your express consent, information may be disclosed to these accreditation bodies to enable them to contact you should you be willing to participate.

Insurance

NATA maintains insurance cover which includes our voluntary Technical Assessors when conducting work on behalf of us. This insurance provides coverage in a number of areas including:

Insurance	Cover
Public Liability and Professional Indemnity	Technical Assessors are indemnified when performing tasks on behalf of NATA.
Group Personal Accident	This insurance provides cover anywhere in the world when engaged in voluntary work authorised by and under the control of NATA. This includes travel to and/or from training/work.

Insurance	Cover
Corporate Travel	<p>Technical Assessors are covered when on authorised business travel from the time the person leaves their residence or business and is continuous for a full 24 hours until the assessor's return. This insurance covers the following categories up to pre-set limits: death & disablement, weekly injury benefit, overseas medical expenses, additional/cancellation/curtailment expenses, luggage, personal effects, travel documents, additional money cover, personal liability, kidnap & ransom, loss of deposits, legal costs, extra territorial workers compensation.</p>
Rental Vehicle	<p>NATA has insurance to cover the excess payable for rental vehicle damage. Therefore, you should not accept the Excess Reduction Insurance or the Personal & Baggage Insurance offered by car rental depots and/or agencies if asked to do so.</p> <p>Note: All insurance becomes void if a rental vehicle is abused (i.e. driven on a private road, an unsealed road or across a country property).</p> <p>All accidents involving rental vehicles must be reported immediately to the car rental depot and/or agency. A copy of the accident report and bill of repairs should also be sent to the NATA Lead Assessor.</p>

NATA does not provide insurance to cover private motor vehicles for Technical Assessors. If using your own vehicle during a NATA assessment it is expected that you maintain your own comprehensive motor vehicle insurance.

Never sign any waivers or disclaimers that may be put to you in the course of your work with NATA. Immediately refer any such documents to NATA for review and attention.

Technical Assessors should also note that if you act outside of the remit of work assigned to you by NATA, our insurance will not cover you.

In the event of an insurance claim being required, contact your nearest NATA office immediately for information and assistance with the claim process.

Consultation for legal matters

Technical Assessors should be aware that the NATA assessment process and/or assessment findings can become the subject of legal proceedings. As a consequence, Technical Assessors may be asked to provide affidavits or even appear in court. In such cases, NATA will provide all necessary assistance and support.

If you are contacted by a legal office for advice, comment or a scientific opinion or you are subpoenaed for a legal appearance that in any way relates to NATA, accredited facilities and/or an assessment that you participated in, please immediately contact NATA's General Manager, Compliance and Governance.

Some guidance is provided below:

NATA's accreditation processes

It is not appropriate under any circumstance to comment on any NATA policy or procedure relating to NATA's accreditation processes. Questions along these lines should be reflected back to the examiner for reference to appropriate NATA staff. This applies whether you are in a tribunal / court environment or in a general discussion with anyone.

Assessment visit matters

When answering questions about a specific assessment that you have participated in, be prudent with your response. In a tribunal/court appearance, restrict your answers on NATA administrative and liaison matters to the contact you have and/or that you were directly involved during the assessment.

On technical issues, it is judicious to keep your responses within your scope of expertise/knowledge.

It is also inappropriate to comment on another Technical Assessor's performance or findings.

Outside of a tribunal/court environment you are obliged to continue to maintain strict confidentiality about any assessment you participated in.

Cultural issues

You may be invited to participate in an assessment where cultural differences may be encountered, for example:

- overseas assessments;
- assessments where the parent company is based overseas.

NATA will provide you with advice on local manners and etiquette where we are aware of these. However, you can also follow the lead provided by the staff of the facility. If you have any uncertainty, discuss it with the NATA Lead Assessor.

In particular, be sensitive, respectful and mindful of the following:

- introduction formalities (e.g. business card exchange practices);
- title/name addressing protocol (e.g. use of formal titles/names rather than familiar names, particularly in the presence of junior staff);

- use of English language:
 - proficiency of facility staff;
 - avoiding use of vernacular terms and slang;
 - slow, clear enunciation and simple sentence structure where English may be a second language and/or interpreters are being used.
- directing attention and issues towards senior staff (e.g. avoid talking directly towards interpreters);
- senior/subordinate staff relations;
Note: Other cultures often place far more emphasis on seniority/respect than is normal in Australian business culture. Be aware that you are in a significant position of authority and will accordingly be treated with a degree of deference and respect.
- dining preferences and etiquette;
- dress code (e.g. tends to be more formal);
- religious observances;
- general conversation topics (e.g. refrain from raising sensitive world topics and take care when making observations about local issues);
- avoid comparing processes and systems (e.g. Australian versus local way of doing things).

5. Assessment arrangements

General overview

Prior to making necessary transport and accommodation arrangements, NATA will discuss any options and needs with the Technical Assessors.

NATA arranges and covers all reasonable costs associated with the conduct of assessment activities including:

- accommodation and meals;
- travel;
- insurance.

It is NATA's policy that arrangements are made at an acceptable standard yet in the most economical manner.

NATA provides or arranges all transport. If, in order to perform an assessment, an overnight stay away from home is required, accommodation is reserved.

Confirmation of arrangements are sent prior to the assessment and it is advised that you carry a copy of the travel itinerary to provide evidence of bookings and confirmation of payment arrangements.

If you use your own car, a distance-based allowance is paid.

NATA asks all Technical Assessors to:

- exercise good judgment with respect to travel expenses;
- check for accuracy of bills and other documents before authorising.

There may be occasions where you may be out-of-pocket for expenses. A form is provided to you to record these and to attach your receipts (tax invoices) for NATA to reimburse you.

The following is a summary of NATA's current travel policy and is subject to change from time to time.

Expense claims

An expenses claim form will be provided as part of the assessment paperwork forwarded to you. This is to be used to claim all reasonable expenses made by you that are not paid for either by the NATA Lead Assessor or by directly charging back to NATA. Example expenses include:

- parking fees and road tolls;
- petrol expenses (only when using rental cars, not for private car use);
- kilometre rate (for private vehicle use only);
- meals paid for by you;
- emergency travel needs (e.g. personal toiletries, etc if your luggage fails to arrive at your destination with you);
- incidentals (to a maximum daily value).

Tax invoice receipts must be obtained to substantiate all expenses which you should attach to the claim form and forward to the NATA Lead Assessor as soon as possible on your return from the assessment.

For small amounts under \$10.00 (e.g. road tolls, parking usually paid by cash) receipts are not normally required.

Air travel

NATA's policy for air travel is to purchase tickets at the lowest cost consistent with good business practice.

For domestic travel, economy class airfares are used.

For international travel, economy class airfares are used where the destination is under seven hours from Australia. Where the destination is over seven hours, business class tickets are purchased.

NATA has no airline preference policy. Despite this, individuals may not insist on an airline purely to accrue frequent-flyer points.

When changes to travel plans are needed which require either cancellation or revision of reservations already made, notify NATA as soon as possible.

Accommodation and meal expenses

NATA's policy is to provide accommodation that is comfortable, convenient, meets business and personal needs and offers good value.

A single room in a business class hotel/motel is the corporate standard.

When departing the hotel, check the account carefully to ensure the expenses incurred are correct. All expenses for which NATA is responsible will be charged back to NATA. You are however responsible for any personal extra expenses such as mini-bar consumption, in-house movies, lengthy personal phone calls, etc and these are to be paid for at the time you check out.

All meals and reasonable expenses will normally be paid for by the NATA Lead Assessor who is accompanying you.

If you are dining alone, NATA will cover the cost of meals either by you submitting a tax invoice with your claim form or by charging the expenses back to your room if dining in the hotel.

Where someone personal will be accompanying you, any additional charges incurred will be required to be covered by you. Please discuss with NATA your intention to bring someone prior to the assessment so any necessary arrangements can be considered.

Rental cars

Car rental will only be used when other means of cheaper or convenient transportation are not available. For example, car rental would not normally be justified for transportation from the airport to the hotel if shuttle bus or taxi service is available.

Where the use of a rental car by a Technical Assessor is necessary, NATA will make the booking. Ensure you are clear on the pick-up, drop-off and other instructions

according to the booking confirmation provided to you. In relation to rental insurance, refer to the Insurance section above.

When using a rental car, if possible, fill it with petrol before returning it as the amount charged for petrol by the car rental companies is far in excess of the normal price. Petrol expenses can be claimed back on the expenses claim form provided to you.

Parking infringements, speeding fines and other driver related traffic offences incurred by Technical Assessors will not be reimbursed by NATA.

Use of private car

Under some circumstances, it may be more cost-effective or convenient for a Technical Assessor to use their private car for transport.

Technical Assessors using private cars on NATA business will be reimbursed at a 'per kilometre' rate that is specified on the expenses claim form provided. Specific costs such as petrol and oil will not be directly reimbursed as they are considered to be included in the per kilometre rate.

The expenses claim form should also be used for any other incurred costs, for example, parking fees and road tolls.

Technical Assessors using their own car for must carry adequate car insurance as NATA does not insure a Technical Assessor's private vehicle.

Parking infringements, speeding fines and other driver related traffic offences incurred by Technical Assessors will not be reimbursed by NATA.

Taxi eTickets

Taxi eTickets are provided as necessary and used the same way as a credit card, but are valid for one trip only.

Any unused Taxi eTicket must be returned to NATA.

6. Roles and responsibilities of the assessment team

Role and responsibilities of NATA

Prior to the assessment NATA will:

- select the assessment team;
- liaise with the Technical Assessor(s) and facility staff;
- clarify potential conflicts of interest between the Technical Assessor(s) and the facility;
- arrange and confirm the assessment logistics including date, time and duration;
- make appropriate travel arrangements and bookings;
- conduct the document review;
- prepare the briefing material, assessment program (timetable), the sample of activities to review and specifically those to be witnessed;
- provide the Technical Assessor(s) with background briefing including previous assessment findings where available, any relevant documentation from the facility as necessary, form(s) to record assessment findings, travel arrangements and bookings as necessary, expenses claim form and any other information as appropriate.

During the assessment the NATA Lead Assessor:

- provides direction and answers questions regarding NATA's assessment processes, accreditation criteria, precedents, etc;
- arranges the pre-assessment team briefing to clarify any matters or queries;
- facilitates the assessment opening meeting;
- coordinates the evaluation of the facility's technical competence and reviews the management system;
- follows-up on issues raised at previous assessments (where appropriate);
- supports and assists the Technical Assessor(s);
- prepares the draft (interim) report on assessment following the final team meeting;
- presents the assessment team's findings to the facility staff at the closing meeting.

After the assessment the NATA Lead Assessor:

- follows-up on any required action arising from the assessment which may include providing a response back to the facility;
- prepares the final (confirmed) report on assessment;
- coordinates the review of the facility's response to any assessment findings which may include Technical Assessor input;
- coordinates the confirmation of the facility's accreditation status once all assessment findings have been closed.

Role and responsibilities of the Technical Assessor

Prior to the assessment you must:

- advise the NATA Lead Assessor of any potential conflicts of interest with the facility to be assessed;
- prepare for the assessment (as outlined in 'What to do Before an Assessment');
- maintain confidentiality.

During the assessment you will need to:

- under the direction of the NATA Lead Assessor, review the competence of the facility to perform the activities for which accreditation is held or being sought;
- gather and record objective evidence using the form provided for this purpose;
Note: Ensure your records are accurate and legible for discussion with the NATA Lead Assessor.
- be aware of the time constraints and the importance of keeping to the assessment program;
Note: If you need to take, or make, mobile phone calls because of an urgent or pressing matter during the assessment, please clear this with the Lead Assessor. It is best if mobile phones are turned off during the assessment, except at breaks.
- be aware of the importance of teamwork;
- keep in touch with and seek direction and guidance from the NATA Lead Assessor during the course of the assessment.

After the assessment ensure you:

- continue to maintain confidentiality;
- as requested, provide the NATA Lead Assessor with feedback on any responses from the facility to assessment findings in a timely manner;
- if relevant, complete and return the expenses claim form together with receipts and any unused Taxi eTickets;
- return any hardcopy briefing material to the NATA Lead Assessor after you have finished with it and/or securely delete any electronic versions held.

<p>It is important to not place yourself in a situation where you are consulting to the facility and hence compromising the assessment.</p>

7. Assessments

The purpose of an assessment

An assessment involves the evaluation of objective evidence to confirm that a facility:

- satisfies the accreditation criteria;
- is competent to perform the activities for which accreditation is held or being sought as covered by the scope of accreditation.

During an assessment it is essential to remember that there may be different ways to satisfy the accreditation criteria, thus it is important to not impose personal opinions / preferences as to how things should be done.

Remember that an assessment is “*a fact-finding mission, not a fault-finding safari*”.

Assessment types

The main types of assessments that may be conducted by NATA include:

Assessment	Accreditation status of facility	Performed by and coverage
Initial assessment	Applicant facility yet to achieve accreditation	Is performed by a NATA Lead Assessor and one or more Technical Assessors to evaluate the facility against all of the accreditation criteria.
Surveillance visit	Accredited facility	Is a scheduled on-site assessment performed by a NATA Lead Assessor mid accreditation cycle. Surveillance visits for the Sleep Disorders Services accreditation programs are an in-office activity. Surveillance visits for the Inspection program may occasionally include a Technical Assessor. The focus of the visit is to review the facility’s management system and selected technical elements.
Reassessment	Accredited facility	Is a scheduled on-site assessment performed by a NATA Lead Assessor and one or more Technical Assessors at the end of the accreditation cycle. The focus of the visit is to review the facility’s technical activities and selected management system elements.

Assessment	Accreditation status of facility	Performed by and coverage
On-site variation visit or desk-top review	Accredited facility	Non-scheduled assessment performed by a NATA Lead Assessor and one or more Technical Assessors where necessary to consider a request for addition(s) to a facility's scope of accreditation.
Follow-up assessments	Accredited facility	Non-scheduled assessment performed by a NATA Lead Assessor and one or more Technical Assessors where necessary to review significant issues identified at the previous assessment.

8. Preparing for assessments

Selection of Technical Assessors

Assessments always consist of a NATA Lead Assessor.

For assessments requiring Technical Assessors, the number selected will be dependent on the breadth of the activities offered by the facility needing to be assessed and the scope of expertise of the individual Technical Assessors.

Technical Assessors are selected to participate in an assessment based on:

- their technical expertise and experience;
- the tests, inspections and/or other services performed by the facility;
- their assessment history;
- their geographic location and that of the facility;
- avoidance of conflicts of interest;
- both their and the facility's agreement.

Document review

In preparation for an assessment, the NATA Lead Assessor may conduct a document review. This involves a review of the facility's management system and related documentation.

The purpose of the document review is to:

- confirm that the has considered and addressed the accreditation criteria;
- provide the NATA Lead Assessor with both an understanding of the facility's operation and an opportunity to identify any specific areas that will need specific review during the on-site assessment.

Assessment briefing information

Technical Assessors are provided with briefing information, referred to as the 'Briefing Notes', prior to the assessment.

The documentation includes:

- information on the purpose of the assessment;
- a copy of the current scope of accreditation (other than for initial assessments);
- copies of the assessment reports for the previous accreditation cycle and any correspondence relating to matters needing to be follow-up during the current assessment;
- relevant information on the facility (e.g. current staff, activities performed, methods/procedures used, equipment, listing of proficiency testing, etc);
- an assessment program (timetable);
- an assessment sampling plan (identifies those activities falling under the scope of accreditation to be specifically reviewed);

- copies of any relevant procedures or records deemed necessary to review prior to the assessment;
- an *Assessment Worksheet* (which may include details of the document review performed by the NATA Lead Assessor);
- a record sheet(s) to record the Technical Assessor's objective evidence.

What to do before an assessment

To prepare for a visit:

- review the briefing information as soon as practicable;
- as necessary, refresh your knowledge of the accreditation criteria and any relevant standards or test methods;
- review the activities performed by the facility (scope of accreditation or other information provided) and advise NATA:
 - immediately if you identify an activity you are not able to assess (this however should not occur as your expertise / experience would have been clarified before your appointment to the assessment);
 - of any specific activity you wish to witness which has not been included in the assessment sampling plan provided.

9. Conducting assessments

The overall flow of assessments follows a consistent pattern involving five sequential phases:

1. Team briefing;
2. Opening meeting;
3. Evaluation of the facility against the accreditation criteria and determination of competence for the activities proposed to be covered, or currently covered, by the scope of accreditation;
4. Final team meeting;
5. Closing meeting.

Team briefing before the assessment

Prior to the assessment, the NATA Lead Assessor will normally gather the assessment team for a team briefing. The meeting may occur:

- on the morning of the assessment; or
- the evening before if the assessment team needed to travel; or
- on occasion by telephone at an appropriate time.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- introduce the team members to one another and specifically the role of the Lead Assessor;
- confirm the assessment timetable, sampling plan and allocation of tasks for each assessment team member;
- advise of any changes which have occurred to the facility since the issue of the briefing information;
- clarify any queries the Technical Assessors may have.

Opening meeting

The NATA Lead Assessor will commence the assessment with an opening meeting with the assessment team and key facility staff.

The meeting will:

- introduce the assessment team and facility staff;
- explain the purpose and scope of the assessment;
- reconfirm the assessment timetable including lunch and other breaks;
- reconfirm the proposed or current scope of accreditation including any changes to be made;
- reconfirm the arrangements made for witnessing of activities;
- confirm the availability of facility staff to be involved and any time constraints on them;

- explain how any assessment findings will be raised and how they will be coded;
- reconfirm the confidentiality of the assessment and its outcome;
- confirm that a room or quiet area has been set aside for the assessment team's use;
- clarify any queries the facility may have.

Assessment of the facility and determination of competence

Following the opening meeting, the evaluation (assessment) of the facility will commence to confirm:

- that the accreditation criteria are satisfied;
Note: The assessment also determines whether the facility is complying with its own documented processes (which must satisfy the accreditation criteria).
- that the facility is competent to perform the activities covered, or to be covered, by the scope of accreditation.

Generally, the NATA Lead Assessor and Technical Assessor(s) work together and support each other. However, the review of the management system is mainly the Lead Assessor's responsibility.

It is important throughout the assessment that the assessment team limits its review to only those activities covered by the facility's scope of accreditation and the accreditation criteria.

The following, which are broadly reflected in the accreditation standards, should be taken into account during the assessment:

- availability of documented processes;
- control of data and information management.
- supervision and technical control of the facility;
- the personnel, including their competency, authorisation(s) and monitoring;
- the suitability and monitoring of the premises / environmental conditions;
- availability, maintenance and calibration of equipment;
- externally provided services and products;
- review of requests, tenders and contracts for services offered;
- handling of test / calibration / inspection items;
- validation and verification of methods including, as relevant, estimation of measurement uncertainty, metrological traceability and sampling activities;
- processes for ensuring the validity of results;
- reporting of results.

As individuals, Technical Assessors may differ in their approach when conducting assessments, however they must always:

- work under the direction and guidance of the NATA Lead Assessor;
- keep within the scope of their assigned tasks, including the assessment timetable provided;
- remain objective and impartial when gathering evidence, including the need to probe further as necessary, through discussions, with facility staff, witnessing activities being performed and when reviewing documentation;
- record their evidence on the form provided in order to support any assessment findings (i.e. whether there is compliance, non-compliance or an opportunity for improvement);

Note: The evidence recorded should include sufficient detail, for example, what was reviewed (reference / identifier of documentation, method, equipment, worksheet, etc), who was spoken to, the “sample size”, etc.

During the assessment the range of activities to be discussed with facility staff and/or witnessed, should be as per the plan provided to you prior to the assessment by NATA. Conducting vertical audits does allow a natural review of workflows to occur while at the same time covering many of the accreditation criteria.

The following topics provide some guidance on key matters to assess. Remember though the NATA Lead Assessor will provide guidance and that they are the “go to” person during the assessment.

Common elements

There are many processes which may be considered common or relevant across various activities performed by the facility being assessed. You should be mindful of these and not draw any conclusions on processes without considering how they apply across all activities. Some of these processes include:

- control of documentation, for example:
 - is there a process for approving documents prior to issue by authorised personnel?;
 - are procedures and forms appropriately identified and the latest versions only available and used by staff?
 - how are required documents updated?
 - is there a process for updating to the latest version of standard methods?
- availability and management of data / information, whether paper based or held electronically, relating to the activities performed.

Note: The data should be sufficiently detailed to allow a ‘reconstruct’ of the activity (whether in part or full).

Data / information may relate to, for example:

- sample receipt and identification;
- instruments printouts or handwritten observations;
- completed worksheets, calculations, including correction (e.g. authorised);

- equipment used, including reagents, consumable, reference standards etc;
- procedures or standard methods followed;
- quality control data proficiency testing where relevant;
- checks (e.g. data transfers) and reviews performed.

Supervision and technical control of the facility

This is one of the important activities to review, notably as management is ultimately responsible for setting directions, including communicating these, and is accountable for the outputs of the facility.

It should be remembered that matters of concern identified with the facility's operations should not necessarily be attributed to individuals, but instead potential failure(s) in the systems and monitoring processes adopted and management's role in overseeing these.

Staff training and competence

During your discussions with staff and witnessing of activities being performed, you should establish whether they:

- are appropriately trained, understand their responsibilities / role and are authorised to performed the activities for which they have been deemed competent;
- are supervised and monitored;
- understand the principles and limitations of the methods and procedures adopted.

Facilities and environmental conditions

Assessment of these should include:

- appropriateness to perform activities (e.g. "fit for purpose", lighting, ventilation, access control, contamination issues etc);
- controlling and monitoring as necessary, which will include the availability of appropriate equipment.

Equipment

Equipment may include but not be limited to measuring instruments, measurement standards, reference materials and data, reagents and consumables, software, auxiliary apparatus etc.

During the assessment, ensure that:

- all necessary equipment is available (or the facility has access to it) and it satisfies needs (for the activities performed);
- equipment is appropriately handled, stored and maintained, including a calibration / check schedule established as necessary;
Note: Where calibration is necessary, it is to be performed in accordance with NATA's *General Accreditation Criteria: Metrological Traceability Policy* and NATA's *General Accreditation Criteria: Equipment Assurance, in-house Calibration and Equipment Verification*.
- operating instructions are adequately documented;
- measures are in place to prevent:
 - accidental adjustments that could invalidate results;
 - use of equipment that is damaged or requiring calibration / checks.

Requests, tenders and contracts

Procedures should be in place which ensure that the facility understands the work requested from customers, that resources are available and that the appropriate methods / procedures are selected. Additional things to consider are the processes adopted when changes to the request are necessary or when reporting to a specification is required.

Handling of items or samples (e.g. for testing / calibration)

The handling of items / samples, including their tracking / traceability to ensure integrity of data is paramount. Some aspects to focus on include receipt of items, suitability, storage (including protection), retention, identification and labelling, sub-sampling and disposal.

Methods and procedures

These should be reviewed to ensure they:

- are documented clearly, in sufficient detail and the latest version available;
- are appropriate to meet the customer's requested services;
- have been verified (including evaluation of measurement uncertainty as relevant) if they are published peer reviewed or standard methods;
- have been validated (including evaluation of measurement uncertainty as relevant) if they are modified standard methods or developed in-house.

Ensuring the validity and reliability of test results

Two main aspects need to be considered for monitoring results including:

- internal measures adopted (e.g. use of quality control materials, reference materials, comparison of results using alternative instruments, retesting, etc)
- comparisons performed with other laboratories (e.g. proficiency testing).

For both aspects, consider the data generated, the facility's monitoring processes and the action taken when the analysis of the data is not within predefined acceptance criteria.

Reports

The criteria for reporting results are included in the relevant accreditation standard. Apart from the information included in reports, attentions should also be given to:

- use of the NATA endorsement (refer to *General Accreditation Criteria: Use of the NATA emblem, NATA endorsement and references to accreditation*) and claims made to accredited activities (e.g. inclusion of results of non-accredited activities);
- how results are expressed (e.g. units, rounding, reporting of measurement uncertainty, compliance statements, decision rules etc);
- reporting of preliminary / interim results;
- control measures in place for issuing electronic reports;
- corrections to reported results (e.g. amended reports);
- processes for reporting results verbally;
- handling result enquiries received from customers.

Management system

The NATA Lead Assessor is responsible for assessing the facility's management system, however, they may request you to review some aspects as necessary. Key areas of a management system include:

- control of documents;
- actions to address risks and opportunities;
- improvements;
- corrective actions;
- internal audits;
- management reviews.

The NATA Lead Assessor is also generally responsible for reviewing the facility's complaints processes despite these not specifically forming part of the management system (as defined by the accreditation standards).

Clarifying assessment findings before drawing conclusions

The process of gathering information during the assessment will uncover events or activities which seem at variance with the requirements for accreditation or the facility's own procedures.

It is important to remain objective, not be clouded by your own views and to note that a facility will never be required to change its work practices based on your own personal opinion.

You should pause, review the information gathered and ask yourself a few questions before coming to any conclusions:

- do you have all the facts?
- what evidence does the facility have that what it is doing is satisfactory?
- what evidence exists that what the facility is doing is not satisfactory?
- is what has been observed wrong or just different to your expectation?
- have you understood the facility's processes?
- can an explanation be provided?
- is the issue isolated or has it occurred more than once indicating a more systemic issue?
- did the facility's own processes identify the issue?

Confirming that a non-conformity exists

Before confirming a finding is indeed a non-conformity (i.e. a condition for accreditation), a twofold test needs to be applied to the evidence gathered:

- can the apparent non-conformity be expressed in words from NATA's Accreditation Criteria (NAC) or from the facility's own documented processes?
- is there specific evidence to support the non-conformity which has been gathered and written down (e.g. observations, worksheet entries, equipment records, test reports, etc)?

During the assessment while engaging with facility staff, it is important to remember to not make any conclusions regarding your findings. It is at the final assessment team meeting where findings will be discussed with the NATA Lead Assessor and decisions made, including the need if necessary for further information to be collected or referral of any matter for additional advice.

Final assessment team meeting

The purpose of this meeting is to enable the NATA Lead Assessor to collate the findings of the assessment team into an interim report for presentation to the facility's representatives at the Closing Meeting.

During the meeting, the NATA Lead Assessor will ask you to complete, if not already done, the form provided to you as part of the briefing package to record your assessment findings. The evidence you record should be:

- sufficiently detailed to support any findings to be raised in the assessment report to be prepared by the NATA Lead Assessor;
- written legibly (if handwritten) and phrased appropriately.

In the relatively short time that is available for this team meeting, the following tasks must be completed under the direction of the NATA Lead Assessor:

- confirm that sufficient evidence has been gathered by the assessment team collectively to determine that the accreditation criteria have been satisfied or otherwise;
- each member of the team must table the evidence they recorded in support of their conclusions;
- any findings to be raised in the assessment report must be graded (coded) and assigned to the relevant clause / subclause of the applicable accreditation standard;
- offer any positive feedback where appropriate.

Assessment report and coding of findings

The NATA Lead Assessor prepares the overall report on the assessment but will seek assistance from you as necessary.

Findings raised in the assessment report will be coded as follows:

Code	Explanation
<p>C (Major nonconformity)</p>	<p>May include, but not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An issue that contributes directly, or has the potential to contribute directly, to the reliability of test results (e.g. inadequate staff training, calibration deficiency, inadequate quality control). This is irrespective of whether the issue is random/infrequent or systemic; • An issue, that whilst it does not contribute directly to the reliability of test results, is systemic (i.e. the same deficiency has occurred on at least a number of occasions); • An issue that contributes directly to how results may be interpreted by the client (e.g. sampling deficiencies); • An issue that has been raised previously as a minor nonconformity but has not been fully or appropriately addressed. <p>A response is required on major nonconformities, including the cause analysis, the action taken and supporting evidence.</p>
<p>M (Minor nonconformity)</p>	<p>May include, but not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An issue is random or infrequent (e.g. only a few staff training records have been found to be out of date); • An issue that does not contribute directly to the reliability of test results but is still a criterion for accreditation (e.g. all staff have received appropriate training for an updated method but this has not been recorded). <p>For initial assessments and variation visits, minor nonconformities must be addressed as per major nonconformities.</p> <p>For all other visits, the cause analysis and action taken or planned to be taken is required. Supporting evidence does not need to be submitted as this will be reviewed at the following assessment visit.</p>
<p>Observation</p>	<p>This may be a recommendation, information, clarification, a reminder or flag for follow-up/review at the next assessment.</p> <p>Observations do not require a response.</p>

Closing meeting

Following the final team meeting, the assessment team and relevant facility staff gather for the Closing Meeting.

A copy of the written interim report prepared by the NATA Lead Assessor is made available to the facility.

The NATA Lead Assessor will direct the meeting and present a summary of the findings of the assessment to the facility and allow discussion. The NATA Lead Assessor may also invite the Technical Assessor(s) to raise any comments as agreed during the final team meeting.

The structure of the meeting is determined by the NATA Lead Assessor, but the sequence below is generally followed:

- reconfirming the purpose of the assessment and the scope of accreditation;
- presenting the assessment findings, including the coding of these;
- inviting the facility staff to comment on any of the findings and resolving any concerns or differences of viewpoints expressed;
- confirming the response date for any nonconformities identified;
- describing the next steps in the process before the accreditation status is confirmed by NATA;
- thanking the facility for its cooperation during the assessment.

10. Post assessment

Cause analysis and corrective action

The facility will be required to respond by the due date to any nonconformity raised in the assessment report.

Addressing a nonconformity involves:

- analysing the extent of the cause (e.g. root cause analysis);
- identifying the impact on work already performed (e.g. have any reported results been compromised?);
- taking specific action to rectify the cause(s), which may include updating existing processes and addressing the impact on any work already performed;
- continuing to monitor the action taken to ensure that it is effective.

The NATA Lead Assessor is responsible for reviewing the facility's response. However, they may seek advice from the Technical Assessor involved in the assessment, notably for nonconformities of a technical nature.

11. Assessment techniques

Under the direction of the NATA Lead Assessor, the assessment team must work together in an objective, effective and efficient manner in accordance with the assessment timetable.

The role of the assessment team is to gather information (evidence) and determine whether a facility satisfies (or not) the NATA Accreditation Criteria.

There are different means of gathering information including:

- asking questions;
- listening;
- observing activities;
- reviewing documentation.

Questioning techniques

When using questions to obtain information during an assessment, there is a range of techniques that should be used.

Open questions

These questions help:

- elicit answers of substance;
- keep the dialogue flowing.

The six questions that will give the most information most effectively and efficiently are:

Who ?

What ?

When ?

How ?

Where ?

Why ?

Direct or closed questions

These questions require a 'yes' or 'no' answer so should be used to:

- obtain a definite answer;
- establish something factual;
- clarify detail;
- bring discussion back on track.

Here are some examples:

“Are you the person who normally performs this test?”

“Do you know who does....?”

“This part of the process says XYZ and this part says ABC, is this correct?”

Hypothetical questions

These questions may be helpful because they:

- pose the unusual;
- establish the understanding of a process;
- allow the review of activities that may not be witnessed during the assessment.

Here are some examples:

“What would you do if?”

“If ABC were to happen, what would this mean to XYZ?”

Clarifying questions

These questions help to:

- prevent misunderstandings;
- obtain more detail.

Here is an example:

“Can you please explain as I don’t quite understand what you mean....?”

Talk through the topic

Talking through the topic (rather than asking a question directly) may help to:

- avoid asking the obvious;
- provide reassurance that you are understanding;
- avoid unnecessary periods of silence;
- build a bridge for further questions.

Here is an example:

“Now let me see - this method sheet shows the method title, the method reference number, the date of issue, the authorising officer’s signature ...”

Confirm answers to questions

Confirming answers to questions provides reassurance that you have understood what was said. However, be careful that you do not come across as doubting.

Answers to questions can be confirmed by:

- asking the same question from a different perspective;
- asking the same question of a different person;
- observing activities;
- examining records.

Periodically summarise

This is a useful technique because it:

- helps you clarify your own thoughts;
- reassures the other person that you are listening and understanding what they are saying;
- provides the opportunity for correction;
- builds a bridge to the next topic.

Here is an example:

“So you left school, worked for two years on building sites, and then went to university and got your degree. What happened next?”

Vary your pattern

This can be achieved by:

- using the “show and tell” technique;
- filling-in any gaps in information by asking additional questions;
- using a combination of open questions, direct questions, and hypothetical questions and clarifying questions.

The “*Show and Tell*” technique combines both observing and listening:

- gathers more information;
- tends to be non-threatening;
- requires thorough preparation.

Allow some periods of silence during question time which can:

- give the other person time to think;
- commit the other person to respond.

Questions to avoid

Self-answering questions

Should be avoided because they:

- lead to the expected answer;
- place unnecessary pressure on the other person.

Here is an example:

“You calibrate this regularly, don’t you?”

Trick questions

Should never be used during assessments because they destroy credibility, create resentment and close off communication.

Consider the following example:

Assessor: *“Do you rotate stock annually?”*

Facility staff: *“Yes”*

Assessor: *“It is supposed to be a six-monthly rotation!”*

Ambiguous questions

It is important to phrase questions carefully and clearly to avoid confusion.

Avoid asking, for example:

“Are you sure that this is the best set of QC data?”

Compound questions

These types of questions should be avoided as they:

- are usually directive;
- are not helpful;
- generate more confusion.

Avoid asking, for example:

“If you found a box on the floor, would you check its contents, label it for quarantine or put it back on the shelf?”

Irrelevant questions

These types of questions should be avoided as they:

- waste time;
- create diversions.

Avoid asking, for example:

“How much did the new computer system cost?”

Questions directed to the wrong person

These types of questions should be avoided as they:

- waste time;
- can generate both confusion and tension.

Listening

If we do not listen attentively, we will miss out on information being provided during discussions and specifically to the questions we are asking.

We are *not listening* when we are:

- waiting to say something ourselves;
- thinking of our response to the answer while the other person is still speaking;
- jumping to conclusions or making assumptions;
- thinking about something else;
- switched-off.

Poor listening can result in:

- conveying disinterest to the other party;
- missing important details.

To be a good listener it is important to:

- focus on the speaker;
- be willing to see things from another's point of view;
- remain calm rather than being defensive;
- accept the person despite having a different opinion.

To show we are listening:

- ask relevant questions;
- use appropriate body language and eye contact;
- use minimal encouragers;
- as appropriate, mirror the mode and pace of the other person's speech;
- be sensitive to the speaker's feelings.

Observing activities

In addition to asking questions, observing personnel perform their routine activities will provide valuable information.

Observing activities will help you to, for example:

- confirm whether documented procedures are being followed (i.e. staff put into practice what is written and what they have said they should do);
- confirm whether staff demonstrate the competencies required to perform tasks;
- evaluate the effectiveness of supervision provided;
- evaluate the resources available;
- evaluate the appropriateness of the environmental conditions;
- review the availability of equipment and its fitness for purpose;
- etc.

As the assessment process is a sampling exercise, it is not possible nor required that every activity covered by the scope of accreditation be reviewed. Apart from observing activities, it is also possible to have hypothetical discussions concerning activities, or parts thereof, not being observed. It may also be acceptable to observe just key phases of specific activities if the overall process is too lengthy.

As part of the preparation for the assessment, the NATA Lead Assessor will prepare a sampling plan of the activities to be reviewed which are covered by the scope of accreditation. This plan will be discussed and confirmed with you. You should advise the NATA Lead Assessor of any activities you specifically wish to observe being performed so that it is included in the plan. This is especially critical for any activity which will require the facility to prepare in advance.

Reviewing documentation

The type of documents you may review during the assessment include:

- policies and procedures;
- records, including for example:
 - relating to personnel (e.g. training, authorisations, etc);
 - completed forms, worksheets, etc;
 - customer requests for tests;
 - equipment maintenance logs, calibrations, etc;
 - test reports;
 - corrective action reports;
 - etc.

Using your quiet time effectively

During the assessment, there may be periods of quiet time. This time can be used to:

- collect your thoughts and determine what further evidence you may need to collect;
- write your notes and evidence on the form provided to you;
- touch base with the NATA Lead Assessor or other co-assessors if they are free.

Dealing with tension

An assessment is a stressful experience for staff at every level in the organisation and hence it is not unexpected that tension may exist. Being mindful of this and modifying your behaviours will make for a better experience for both the staff and the assessment team.

Tension during an assessment can lead to:

- defensive responses;
- reluctant communication;
- occasional aggression;
- poor performance.

To reduce tension during an assessment:

- put people at ease;
- project an appropriate image;
- recognise your own tension.

Maintain a professional approach by:

- ensuring your preparation is thorough and complete and your appearance is appropriate and professional;
- staying on track during the assessment by:
 - avoiding diversions, however interesting;
 - following your plan (as far as possible);
 - managing your time;
 - keeping control of your part of the assessment.

To project the right image, ensure you:

- are courteous and constructive;
- maintain an objective and unbiased approach;
- remain calm and self-controlled;
- maintain a balanced perspective.

When things seem wrong:

- be specific about the anomaly or inconsistency;
- challenge the specific issue, not the person;
- avoid judgemental or dogmatic descriptions;
- avoid absolutes (such as never, always).

Teamwork

During an assessment, teamwork involves a common purpose and mutual understanding of roles between the Technical Assessor(s) and the NATA Lead Assessor.

To work as a team:

- support one another;
- do not interrupt one another;
- do not undermine anyone in the team;
- respect each others approach.

Be aware of the other team member's needs by allowing time for:

- everyone to collect their thoughts;
- clarify questions;
- seek each others advice and support.

If you disagree with a comment or suggestion made by another team member, be sure you:

- ascertain whether or not the issue is important enough to be raised;
- consult with the NATA Lead Assessor if necessary;
- remain professional and never have an open disagreement in front of the facility staff.

Keep the assessment flowing by:

- following a natural sequence of activities;
- avoid back-tracking unnecessarily;
- maintaining an orderly flow of questions;
- avoiding long unnecessary periods of silence;
- projecting confidence.

12. Contacting NATA

NATA may be contacted on 1800 621 666 or corpcomm@nata.com.au.

Amendment table

The table below provides a summary of changes made to the document with this issue.

Section	Amendment
Entire document	<ul style="list-style-type: none">References to the Assessor Resource Kit (ARK) have been removed as this is no longer available as a hard copy. All relevant accreditation documents are now available from the NATA website and the portal.