



Professional Writing for Child Welfare Practice and Supervision

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### ETHICS & PROFESSIONAL WRITING

- Saying what you mean
- Meaning what you say
- Linking names with appropriate pronouns
- Protecting clients
  - Confidentiality
  - Issues of “harmful consequences”
  - Preserving healthy relationships
- Protecting agency interests
  - Take credit for the work you do
  - Know your audience
  - Know your agency’s rules

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### WRITING WITH STYLE

- Stylistic distinction for professional writing
  - Value free
  - Objective narratives
  - Subjective nature
- Court reports
- Case plans
- Case notes

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### WRITING WITH STYLE

- Case Reports:
- Case Plans:
- Case Notes:

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### EXCEPTIONS TO PROFESSIONAL STYLES

- Evaluating practice & Making recommendations
  - Requires subjective judgements
    - Is the practice technique effective?
    - What does the social worker do that inhibits or encourages the client’s success?
    - What outside influences need to be acknowledged (i.e., marital problems, family crisis, etc.)?
    - Acknowledgement of evaluators’ bias
- Court petitions
  - Legal document with a prescribed elements that must be adhered to.
  - Tends to come from templates

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### RECOMMENDED FORMAT

- APA format is most widely used in social work research and the social sciences field.
- Support documentation with research
- Cite research appropriately and effectively.
  - Example: Grief counseling was chosen as the most appropriate intervention for John (Simms, 2001) based on the following symptoms....
  - Example: Cassie displays symptoms of PTSD based on the DSM-V (2004).
- Provide a bibliography or use footnotes for in-text citations.
  - See handout for how to reference materials.

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## GENERAL WRITING TECHNIQUES

- Effectively writing to communicate.
- Words and phrases to avoid.
- Structure of reports and documents.
- Importance of grammar and sentence structure.

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## WRITING EFFECTIVELY

- Goal: Communicate clearly with targeted audience.
- Elements:
- Expectations readers have & how to communicate with them.
  - Judges
  - Administrators
  - Therapists/colleagues
  - Families

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## WRITING EFFECTIVELY

Bringing a  
child or  
family to  
*life.*



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## WRITING EFFECTIVELY

Expectations readers have and  
how to communicate with them:

- Judges
- Administrators
- Therapists/colleagues
- Families

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## WORDS & PHRASES TO AVOID

- Always & Never
- Being too "wordy"
  - i.e., based on the fact that = because
- Being "redundant"
  - i.e., could be perhaps because = could be because
  - i.e., distinctly different = distinctly = different
- Use of Slang and Informal Language
- Do Not Use:
  - Sexist language
  - Incorrect plurals
  - Contractions

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## STRUCTURE OF REPORTS & DOCUMENTS

- Purpose section
  - Identifies the purpose of the document
  - Identifies the author and contributors
  - Identifies who the document is about
- An updated summary section
  - Clarifies the circumstances that brought this family/child to the attention of the Department
  - Highlights significant events
  - Provides a chronology of decision points

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## STRUCTURE OF REPORTS & DOCUMENTS

- Description of current status
  - Provides descriptive information about events and decisions in chronological order since the last document.
  - Emphasizes the context for recommendations, which are made in a later section.
  - Records information with the elements of good documentation:
    - Specific
    - Objective
    - Clarity
    - Omissions
    - Completeness
    - Accuracy
    - Professional

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## STRUCTURE OF REPORTS & DOCUMENTS

- Recommendations:
  - Requires judgment about which behaviors are acceptable, and which behaviors cannot be tolerated.
  - Should capture patterns or themes of concerns
  - Should be clear and concise.
  - Should be specific
  - Should be “doable” within the means or resources of the client
  - Can be supported by including quotes, or placing contextual reminders within the recommendation.
- The same principles apply to assessments of employees.

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## STRUCTURE OF REPORTS & DOCUMENTS

- Discussion Section
  - Include when required or when a summary is needed.
  - The only appropriate place to “hypothesize” what may happen to the client/family.
  - Generally includes any analytical discussions.

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## Grammar & Sentence Structure

- Half-empty comparisons
- Run-on sentences
- Using commas
- Important differences between people and things.

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## Half-Empty Comparisons

- Use parallel construction in your sentences.
- If you use the comparative form of an adjective (i.e., the *-er* form, like older, faster, better), clearly identify which two items are being compared.

*Jill was better today.*

v.

*Jill was better today than she was the last time I saw her.*

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## Run-On Sentences

- Clauses
- Conjunctions
- Commas & other punctuation

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## Using Commas

- Overlearning the comma rules
  - Before “and” & “or
  - When you need a breath

I wanted to include Tami’s sister, mother, brother, and uncle in the family team meeting, because they seemed to be supportive to Tami in the past.

v.

I wanted to include Tami’s sister, mother, brother and uncle in the family team meeting because they seemed to be supportive in the past.

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## Differences Between People and Things

- The family members in the courtroom were the same ones *that* came to the house later.
- The family members in the courtroom were the same one *who* came to the house later.

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## Providing Feedback

- Goal: To provide others with feedback with the purpose of enhancing the document’s:
  - Clarity
  - Focus
  - Logic
  - Professional quality
- Facilitative v. Non-Facilitative

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## Using Technology to Support Professional Writing

- Track changes
- Insert comment
- Spell & Grammar check
- Compare and Merge documents

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## Sharing electronic files

- Confidentiality and ethical concerns
- Password security
- Email

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