

# **Professional Writing for Child Welfare Practice and Supervision**

Patricia C. Gilbaugh, Ph.D. Candidate, LMSW



# **Professional Writing for Child Welfare Practice and Supervision**

## **Description**

This workshop provides in-depth instruction for supervisors to assist caseworkers with their professional writing skills.

## **Learning Outcomes**

**At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:**

1. Identify ethical considerations involved with professional writing in child welfare.
2. Understand the supervision process of professional writing.
3. Identify the structure and methods of feedback involved with assisting supervisees and co-workers with their professional writing.
4. Demonstrate an ability to apply technological advances to assist with professional writing.
5. Identify effective strategies to effectively communicate through written documentation.

## Checklist for Professional Writing in Child Welfare

- The document's purpose is clear.
- The focus of the document is concise.
- Arguments and opinions are logical.
- Recommendations are well-supported.
- Clients' confidentiality is addressed within ethical considerations.
- Structure is appropriate
  - Pronouns are linked with the right names.
  - Grammar is correct (no run-on sentences, half-empty comparisons, or overuse of commas)
  - Formatting is clear; use of headings is appropriate
- As a reader of the document, you can answer "yes" to these questions:
  - Do I understand the content of this document?
  - Do the recommendations make sense to me?
  - Has the author alleviated all my concerns about protecting the client?
  - Has the author alleviated all my concerns about protecting the agency?
  - Is the document something the worker and I can be proud of?
  - Do I feel like I *know* the family or child this document was written about?
- As a reader of the document, you can answer "no" to these questions:
  - Does anything in the document leave me with any unanswered questions?
  - Did I have to interpret on my own any important information?
- The writer effectively communicated value-free, objective descriptions while at the same time painted a clear picture of his or her judgments involved in the recommendations presented.

## Tracking Document Changes

Use this function when you want to see the revisions made in the same version of a document.

**TIP:** This is most helpful with you are editing another person's document or if you are working on a report in a team environment. By using this function, you and others can easily see what changes have been made to the document, and by whom.

### Step by Step:

1. Right click on the grayed out **TRK** text on the status bar and select Track changes from the shortcut menu that appears. (Alternatively, click on **Tools** and select **Track Changes** from the menu bar.)
2. The **Reviewing** toolbar appears. Move the mouse pointer over the buttons on the toolbar to see which commands are available.
3. Type some new text in the document. The new text is underlined and is a different color. Changes are also flagged by a vertical line in the margin.

### Disabling Document Tracking

1. Double-click **TRK** on the status bar. (It automatically turns the function off.)

**TIP:** When you place the mouse pointer over a revision mark, the username of the person who made the edit is displayed in a Screen Tip.

(Lewis, 2003, 55)

## Accepting and Rejecting Tracked Changes

Use when you are ready to finalize any tracked changes in a document. You need to determine which changes to accept and which changes to reject before doing anything electronically. If you accept a change, Word keeps the text change and removes the revision marks. If you reject a change, Word deletes the new text and restores the old.

### Step by Step:

1. Open the **View** menu and select **Toolbars, Reviewing** to open the Reviewing toolbar in a document that contains revision marks.
2. Click the **Reviewing Pane** button on the Reviewing toolbar to see extra information about the various changes, edits, and comments in the edited document.
3. The Reviewing Pane opens at the bottom of the screen. Click the **Next** button on the Reviewing toolbar to locate a change in the document.
4. Click the **Accept Change** button on the Reviewing toolbar to accept the change. Alternatively, click the **Down Arrow** next to the button to see other options.
5. Click the **Next** button to move to the next tracked change.
6. Click the **Reject Change/Delete Comment** button to reject the tracked change. Alternatively, click the **Down Arrow** next to the button to see other options.
7. When finished, your document should have no more tracked change indicators and the Reviewing Pane will display **(none)**.

**TIP:** If you want to accept or reject all changes at once, click the **Accept All Changes** in Document or **Reject All Changes** in Document option in the drop-down list boxes on the Reviewing toolbar. If you don't want to accept or reject a change but want to leave the revision mark intact, click the **Next** button to move to the next revision mark.

(Lewis, 2003, 56-57)

## Inserting and Viewing Comments

Use when you want to remind yourself, or the author, to check on something or to verify some information when you work on the document later. Instead of adding a note to yourself or others directly into the text, you can add a comment.

**TIP:** The authors of comments are automatically indicated according to the users' login ID or registered users of a computer.

### Step by Step:

1. After you select the text (or anything else in the document) where you want to insert a comment, open the **Insert** menu and select **Comment**.
2. Type your comments in the bubble (in Print Layout view; in Normal view you must type into the Reviewing pane). Click anywhere in the document when finished.
3. Deselect the **Comments** option from the **Show** menu on the Reviewing toolbar to hide your comments (open the View menu and select Reviewing if it's not displayed).
4. The comment is hidden. (Only the checked items on the **Show** menu appear in the document.)

### Editing a Comment

You can edit your comments by selecting the highlighted area of the comment or the comment bubble with the mouse, right clicking, and selecting **Edit Comment** from the shortcut menu that appears. Then, make any changes you want.

### Deleting a Comment

You can delete a comment by selecting the highlighted area of a comment or the comment bubble with the mouse, right clicking, and selecting **Delete Comment** from the shortcut menu that appears.

**TIP:** A document with comments prints in smaller fonts with the comments printed in the margins. You have to delete all comments, or use the **Help** function to print with normal page formatting and not have the comments show.

(Lewis, 2003, 90-91)

## Checking Spelling and Grammar

Use to electronically check spelling, which Word indicates within the document as a red wavy line underneath a misspelled word. Use to electronically check grammar, which Word indicates within the document as a green wavy line underneath phrase or sentences that is grammatically incorrect.

**TIP:** You can check for spelling and grammar errors at any point in the document. You do not have to start from the beginning, and you can exit the function at any point. Word's spelling and grammar check doesn't catch everything, so you still need to proofread your document.

### Step by Step:

1. Click the **Spelling and Grammar** button on the Standard toolbar to open the Spelling and Grammar dialog box.
2. The first spelling or grammatical error in your document appears, as well as suggestions for fixing the problem. If an option in the **Suggestions** list is correct, click it.
3. Click the **Change** button to change this instance, or click **Change All** to change it throughout the document. Word makes the change and moves to the next error.
4. If a word is incorrectly flagged, click **Ignore Once** to ignore this instance or **Ignore All** to ignore it throughout the document. Word moves to the next error.
5. If Word incorrectly flags a word you use frequently, click the **Add to Dictionary** button to add the word to the dictionary Word uses to check your spelling.
6. If Word flags a grammatical problem but no useable suggestions appears in the Suggestions list, click and type the change in the document to correct the problem.
7. Click the **Resume** button in the Spelling and Grammar dialog box to continue checking the document.
8. After Word has reviewed all the inaccuracies in your document, it displays a message telling you the spelling and grammar check is complete. Click **OK**.

**TIP:** Sometimes, the correct spelling for a misspelled word is not listed among the options in the **Suggestions** list. If so, select the word in the **Not in Dictionary** text box, type the correct spelling over it, and click the **Change** or **Change All** button.

(Lewis, 2003, 50-51)

## Compare and Merge Documents

Use this function when you want to compare documents to see changes made in various drafts.

Most useful when you have not worked on a document for a longer period of time, or if you have submitted a “final” draft that needs to be revised based on someone else’s’ feedback.

**TIP:** When you make changes to your documents, you should keep copies of older versions of them in case you need to determine which changes have been made. A quick way to find the differences between older and newer versions of a document is to do a “document compare”. After you compare the documents, depending on the current document view (i.e., Normal view v. Print layout view), new text appears in one color with underlined and old text appears in a different color with strikethrough (known as revision marks).

### Step by Step:

1. Open the most recent version of the document you want to compare.
2. Open the **Tools** menu and select **Compare and Merge Documents**.
3. Locate and double-click an earlier version of the file you opened in step 1 to compare the two versions.
4. Review the differences that the compare reveals. The details are in the comment bubble.

**TIP:** You can save each draft by inserting the revision date in the footer of each draft.

(Lewis, 2003, 54)

## Password Security in Word Documents

Use when you want to protect your document from unintended readers. You can do so either by restricting access to the document or by preventing changes from being made within each document.

This function is particularly helpful when submitting documents outside of the intranet, such as sending a report to a collaborating agency.

**TIP:** Password to Modify allows someone to read the document but must know the password to make any changes. Read-Only suggests the document to be opened as Read-Only, but doesn't require it.

### Step by Step:

1. Open the **Tools** menu and select **Options** to open the Options dialog box.
2. Click the **Security** tab and type a password in the **Password to Open** field (any time you try to open the document, you must enter the same password); then click **OK**.
3. Reenter the password in the **Confirm Password** dialog box and click **OK** to return to the document. When others attempt to open file, a password will be required.

**TIP:** Use a consistent method of choosing passwords. For example, use the number of the month followed by the first four letters of your last name followed by the first three letters of the client's last name (i.e., 2gilbsmi).

(Lewis, 2003, 53)

# Providing Feedback

## Goal

Help each other improve the clarity, focus, and logical meanings of a professional document.

## Facilitative Language

Describes your reactions as you read the document; asks questions; requests additional information.

## Non-facilitative Language

Judges; argues; persuades; tells writer what to do.

## Examples:

I got lost here.

Not clear.

I'm confused.

Confusing.

Did you mean...?

Clarify.

This sentence tells me...is that what you meant?

How does this sentence relate to your topic sentence?

Omit.

How does this paragraph relate to your document's purpose?

Off topic

This sounds like a different topic

Irrelevant

From what you were saying before on p. X, I thought...

Contradictory  
Not logical

What is the other side of the argument?

Biased.

...other possible explanation...

Not consistent with what we know or I disagree.

I thought this was covered on p. X

Redundant

This seems to relate to what you were saying on p. X.

Omit or Move to p. X

## **Bibliography**

American Psychological Association (1992). Removing Bias in Language.

Retrieved February 20, 2006, from

<http://www.apastyle.org/disabilities/html>.

Lewis, N. (2003). Easy Microsoft Office 2003. [www.quepublishing.com](http://www.quepublishing.com)

Martineau, H. (2003). How to Observe Morals and Manners. Reprint.

Originally published: Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1838.

Szuchman, L. & Thomlison, B. (2000). Writing with Style: APA Style for Social Work. Toronto: Wadsworth.