



TUTOR TIPS

Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation
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REPORT WRITING – (PART 2)

In Part 1 of Report Writing we discussed reports: what they are, their purpose and their structure. In this Tutor Tip we bring you Part 2 of Report Writing, which will focus on the language features and legal implications of reports

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LANGUAGE FEATURES:

The aim of the report is to present clear, concise information in a businesslike manner. So, the report should contain correct data, it should be without prejudice or bias and should avoid use of colloquial terms, slang, idioms and emotive language.

LANGUAGE FEATURES	EXAMPLES
<p>Spoken language is generally avoided, unless composing a 'verbose' report. In this instance, discretion should be employed to include context and background (see legal implications below).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In recent times – <i>recently</i> • She seemed stressed out – <i>she was distressed/concerned</i> • The child got out of hand – <i>the child behaved erratically</i> • So to say – <i>as stated</i> • She didn't give a damn – <i>she appeared unconcerned</i> • Above board - <i>legitimate</i> • What goes around, comes around. – <i>consequence of action</i>
<p>Personal language is subjective and can diminish the authority of the report/argument. To avoid using personal pronouns use verbs in the passive voice.</p>	<p>The use of personal pronouns – I, we, our, make the reader aware of the writer's presence. Inclusion of judgement – I believe, I feel, further places the writer's bias in the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change <i>I asked the babysitter</i> to <i>The babysitter was asked</i>.
<p>The use of emotive and/or loaded words and phrases is subjective and personal and is attempting to persuade the reader to the writer's point of view through emotion rather than a conclusion based on objective evidence. Loaded language further opens the text to greater misinterpretation and bias and does not consider the cultural, socio-economic, linguistic framework or background of the reader.</p>	<p>Avoid emotive language such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the mother dealt with the child was <i>deplorable</i>. • The compliance with current workplace health and safety rules was <i>exceedingly unsatisfactory</i>. • <i>I cannot believe</i> that anyone would allow such a thing to happen.

<p>Rhetorical questions in reports are avoided. These are questions that do not require an answer. The writer assumes the reader already knows, or answers the question in the text. They imply shared knowledge leading to possible misinterpretations.</p>	<p>Rhetorical questions should be avoided. These should be rephrased as statements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the students expect to pass exams if they don't attend class and don't study? <i>Encourage class attendance and study to achieve academic success.</i> • Why continue providing funding for a program that does not produce results? • Continued funding for programs that do not produce results is under review. • Should workers be celebrated for underperformance? <i>The answer is clearly in the negative.</i> • Underperformance of workers will be addressed privately during performance appraisals
<p>Place adverbs within the verb rather than in the initial or final positions. Avoid incomplete sentences when writing a report such as 'etc'; 'so to say', and 'so on'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blood is withdrawn slowly – <i>The blood is slowly withdrawn.</i> • Then the children went outside etc – <i>The children then went outside for activities.</i>
<p>Reports often use nominalizations. This is the noun forms of the verb. The text will focus on concepts and objects rather than describing actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We held a trivia night to raise money for a water tank – <i>The trivia night raised money for a water tank</i> • Everyone wants to get a water tank to save water for their garden – <i>Water Tanks are a popular method of conserving water</i> • The parents were becoming worried their children were being neglected in childcare – <i>The concern of neglect in Childcare Centre's worried parents.</i>

ACTIVITY:

The following case notes give examples of **recording observations, including emotive language and judgement, as well as more factual observations.**

Read the case notes and for Case Notes #1, list the adjectives used to describe the situation from Case Notes #1. Are these adjectives objective and without judgement? Can these adjectives be interpreted more than one way??

Case Notes # 1: Worker:

When I arrived at the home, Wendy was dishevelled, groggy, and she looked like she needed a shower. She didn't seem happy to see me. I asked to see the baby. She tried to change the subject by commenting on the weather. I convinced her that I needed to see David. He was in his play area. He was filthy dirty and depressed. He looked like he had been there for several days. I told Wendy that I didn't think she was looking after him. She got angry and more resistive. I asked her if she had been feeding him, and if so, what? She assured me he was eating, but he looked like he had lost even more weight. I told Wendy that we had to take David to the Doctor immediately. She became uncooperative, aggressive and irrational. I took David to the emergency room myself.

In the second record, Case Notes #2, the worker uses nouns and verbs to describe behaviours to provide more objective descriptions. The worker does not use labels nor make judgements. The description speaks for itself. It is clear the child's safety is under consideration and that Wendy has not been cooperative on this occasion.

Case Notes #2: Worker:

Wendy answered the door dressed in a nightgown. She said she had been sleeping. Her speech was thick and halting. She appeared to look past me, her eyes were partly closed, and her face looked swollen. She asked why I was there. I reminded her we had an appointment, agreed about 'the weather' and asked to see David. She said he was sleeping and couldn't be disturbed. I insisted and followed Wendy to the bedroom. David was in his play area wearing a soiled nappy. The sheets and blanket smelt of urine and faeces. David had nappy rash. He did not respond when I said his name. I turned his face towards me and he did not focus on me. I lifted him and he felt lighter than last time. I told Wendy that we needed to take him to the doctor. Wendy swore at me, told me to leave her alone and said she would not go anywhere with me. She went to her bedroom shut and locked the door. I placed David in a blanket, called the office and took him to the Children's Hospital.

Case Notes # 3: Worker:

Some reports will require the worker to summarise their conclusions. These are clearly identified as her perceptions and judgements. They are also contextualised and written within a theoretical framework. The notes might include the following conclusion:

I have worked with Wendy for two months and have observed behaviour that leads to my belief that Wendy was on drugs or alcohol or both. Her speech, erratic behaviour and her appearance supports this belief. This has been typical of my home visits. This is the third time I have found David in similar circumstances. He is lighter than two months ago when home visits began, and is less responsive. At this time, I do not believe Wendy is providing a safe environment for David.



LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Reports can be **subpoenaed** for Court as legal documents. They need to be **concise, accurate** and **difficult to misinterpret**. The **more concise** a report is, without omitting relevant facts and information, **the less 'open' it is to misinterpretation**.

EXAMPLE 1:

Home Visit # 1

On September the 17th I met Richard at his house. When I got there, Johnny was playing on his bike outside. Richard was not home from work yet; he was late, so I started playing with Johnny and chatted with the babysitter until Richard returned. Johnny looks happy and healthy. The babysitter said he has been eating and sleeping well, and didn't seem to be having any problems. When Richard arrived, we went into the house and met in the living room. He told me his ex-wife had called and threatened to take him back to court for custody of Johnny if he didn't let him see her when she wanted to. He said she had been coming around to the house at all hours of the night and waking the neighbours. He said he didn't want her to visit with Johnny because nothing had changed with her, and he was afraid she would abuse Johnny again if she got the chance. He asked me whether I thought it would be a good idea to file a restraining order against her. He also assured me that his babysitting arrangements were set for

the new year, when the sitter had to go back to school. Richard had arranged for his mother's aunt, an elderly woman who lives up the street from his mother, to care for Johnny during the day until Richard got home from work.'

Same Home Visit:

Home visit, 17/09/09: I visited with Johnny and the babysitter in the yard until Richard arrived home from work. The sitter reported that Johnny had been eating & sleeping well, and she felt he was happy and healthy. Richard reported that his ex-wife has said she will file for custody if unable to visit him when she wanted. She has frequently come to the house late at night to visit. Richard stated his concern about the possibility of abuse during a visit, and asked about the validity of a restraining order. Richard has organized for his mother's aunt to provide daytime care for Johnny when the babysitter returns to school.

EXAMPLE 2:

The report writer is required to demonstrate discretion and good judgement in determining what to omit and what to include in a report – particularly drawing from Case Notes that may be accessed for legal purposes. An example is: a Social Workers Report about the safety of a parent/s to have custody of a child returned after being in the care of The Department of Child Safety. A Supervised Access Visit between the child and parent – case notes that form a report:

#1 Worker

Ms Smith arrived late again and provided her usual excuse – that the bus was late. She greeted Johnny absently and led him into the play area. She handed him some fruit for afternoon tea which is a good change from her usual afternoon tea of chocolate. Johnny ate some of the apple and dropped the rest on the ground then ran to the reading area and started pulling the books off the shelf violently while screaming and stamping his feet.

Ms Smith jumped up, ran to him and yelled 'you bad, naughty boy!', looked at me and then made a show of comforting him.....

#2 Worker

Ms Smith arrived at 2:10pm. She greeted Johnny and they went to the play area. She gave him some fruit for afternoon tea. Johnny ate some fruit and went to the reading area. Johnny's behaviour was consistent with the start of his visit – overly excited. Ms Smith went to comfort him and assist him with choosing a book.

Recommendations:

Change the visit time to be more accommodating of Ms Smith's transport requirements and conduct the visit when Johnny is less tired. Mornings are preferable

Ms Smith is responding well to suggestions around nutrition to better manage Johnny's ADHD.

