



## APS Case Documentation and Report Writing Unit Meeting Template

**Purpose:** Welcome to the APS Case Documentation and Report Writing-Unit Meeting Template. This template is intended to be used as a follow up to the APS Case Documentation and Report Writing Training and/or the APS Case Documentation and Report Writing eLearning. The suggested training topics and exercises are selected to provide ideas and content for a small one hour training or unit meeting. Although this template is designed with the intent of providing ideas and suggested exercises for a one hour session, if all of the suggested discussion areas and exercises are utilized, the length of the session would likely run well beyond the intended hour.

**Objectives:** Due to the limited duration for which this template is designed, the objectives for the template are fewer and narrower than for the all-day training or eLearning. The objectives for this Unit Meeting Template are:

1. **Describe the purpose of accurate, complete, and timely documentation.**
2. **Demonstrate the use of clear, concise, and objective language.**
3. **Analyze an APS report, identify poor documentation and rewrite report making sure it is clear, objective, and concise and has the elements which will stand up in court.**

**Using this template:** This template provides suggested discussion areas to cover certain salient points. Alternative uses for template content and suggestions of other types of activities are offered to allow maximum flexibility for the Supervisor or trainer to use suggested content, or to substitute content of their own for discussion. Some suggestions may seem obvious; however, as this template is designed to be utilized by persons with very different levels of experience at leading activities, there has been an attempt to address simple questions or problems as well as providing useful suggestions and input for modifying what you want to focus on.

**Potential uses for this template:** This template is designed to be flexible enough to be used for a variety of purposes. It can be used as:

- A follow up to the full-day training or the eLearning to help solidify the concepts of the training or eLearning in the minds of staff;
- An adjunct or temporary introduction to new staff on case documentation and report writing (perhaps to get new staff started before the regular training can take place);

- A refresher to the training or eLearning if some time has passed, or to address perceived problems in staff documentation.

**TOPIC 1: Purposes of documentation** -discussion (approximate time frame-10 minutes)

**Likes and Dislikes** -Workers often express strong likes and dislikes about documentation. You may want to begin by raising this topic. Allowing workers to ‘vent’ a little about their dislikes and to discuss what they may like may prove to be a good opener and may make them more amenable to discussing documentation. It may be best to keep this discussion brief; the idea is to allow staff to acknowledge that documentation may not be fun, not to amplify their complaints in this area.

Suggested areas to cover in this part of the discussion:

- Worker likes and dislikes such as: not enough time, missing documentation by others, etc.

**Purpose of Documentation** - Some workers may not know, or may have forgotten the purposes of documentation. Touching on these important functions may let them know, or remind them that good documentation is more than just something that you have to do to keep your supervisor happy. You might start the discussion by asking the group, “What do you think is the main purpose of documentation?”

Suggested areas to cover in this part of the discussion, if not mentioned by staff:

- Documentation to establish baseline data.
- Documentation as evidence of involvement - both justification for being involved and the importance of documentation for court.
- Documentation used to show that the case was handled properly.
- Documentation for purposes of consistency - to demonstrate that the case was handled efficiently and that all relevant leads were followed up on.
- To justify the need for staffing and/or funding - through documentation of the work required as well as the complexity of the work done on the case.

**Considerations about documentation** - This discussion area may serve to let new staff know and to remind seasoned staff that documentation may not only be seen or utilized by APS, but may be seen and utilized as evidence in a variety of other situations.

Suggested areas to cover in this part of the discussion:

- Who will read your documentation? (possibilities, among others, include: agency director, attorneys, auditors, and judges)

- Where will it end up? (possibilities include: local Board of Supervisors or state officials, law enforcement agencies, conservatorship hearings, civil court actions, criminal court actions)
- Who benefits from good documentation? (possibilities include: the worker, their agency, the legal system, and the client)

**TOPIC 2: Clear Documentation** - discussion and exercise (approximate time frame 20-45 minutes)

**Essential components for effective documentation** -You many want to begin this section with a discussion of documentation basics. New staff will need to know them, and seasoned staff can always use a reminder. Begin the discussion with the list of effective documentation components listed (and add more if you feel inclined); then expand to the list of what factual documentation should include. You can lead this activity by citing the examples listed below, or you can facilitate a ‘shout out’ activity by asking participants to identify these areas, and writing them out on a white board or a flip chart (making sure that they cover all of the areas listed and highlighting any problem areas that you want to focus on). As a suggestion, you may want to briefly identify the elements of effective documentation to be sure that all are touched on, however, your interaction may flow naturally to areas that staff are confused about or have more difficulty with.

**Essential Components:**

Effective documentation must be:

- Clear and factual
- Objective
- Concise

**Factual documentation should include:**

- Direct and systematic observations
  - What you saw, heard, smelled
- Information obtained by other professionals
  - Medical diagnosis and prognosis
  - Bank statements
  - Legal documents
- Direct quotes
- Clear language

- Understood by any reader
- Uses limited acronyms and lingo

### **1. Clear and Concise Documentation Exercise – Approximately 20 minutes**

Workers may be familiar with the Rat Feces Exercise from the in-person case documentation training. This exercise is built upon the in-person exercise. The exercise directions are reproduced here for use by the supervisor/trainer. The handout for workers is **Attachment #1** and can be found at the end of this template. You may have workers make changes on their copies of the narrative individually or you can have them work in pairs.

HINT: having more than one person working on handouts together and then reporting out at the end of the exercise may foster more discussion.

Read the following narrative information carefully:

**The worker walked into the kitchen and observed mice scurrying under the cabinets when the light was turned on. Feces were all over the floor. The client’s daughter said her mother liked mice but she didn’t like people. Mrs. Jones said she was surprised that the mice stayed around with so little food in the house, and then she walked out of the room.**

Please rewrite the narrative so that it answers the following questions:

- a. Who was at the interview?
- b. Who is the client?
- c. Who is Mrs. Jones? And, who is the daughter?
- d. What type of feces was on the floor? How much feces was on the floor?
- e. Did the client have enough food? Is the client going hungry?
- f. Is the client ambulatory? Who walked out of the room?

### **2. Subjective Versus Objective Documentation - Approximately 20 minutes**

#### **Definitions of Subjective and Objective**

It may be best to begin this important discussion by defining and discussing the meanings of subjective and objective documentation. This can be a point of confusion for both new and seasoned workers. Workers are asked to use all of their senses and their intuition to assess and analyze the situations that they encounter; then they are asked to document only the objective facts. This can be very confusing.

Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary offers (among others) these two definitions of the word subjective: "(1) : peculiar to a particular individual : personal <subjective judgments> (2) : modified or affected by personal views, experience, or background <a subjective account of the incident>"

Objective is defined by the same source as: "of, relating to, or being an object, phenomenon, or condition in the realm of sensible experience independent of individual thought and perceptible by all observers: having reality independent of the mind <objective reality>"

If these formal definitions seem daunting, then simpler definitions can be found on the handout entitled Objective vs. Subjective Writing (**Attachment #2**).

### **Objective vs. Subjective Writing Exercise**

This exercise is designed to stimulate discussion on subjective and objective documentation. Using **Attachment #2 - Objective vs. Subjective Writing**, provide copies of the handout to all of the participants. Ask them to review the list and identify which words are subjective in nature versus objective. There will likely be disagreements, and that can be a good thing as it may stimulate some careful consideration and discussion about different ways that these terms can be used. In this exercise, as with others, the point is not to determine all of the correct answers, but is rather to get participants to think and discuss subjectivity and objectivity in documentation. This type of discussion is more likely to be retained than simply reading off lists of subjective versus objective terms. If time is limited, you may want to discuss just one column of terms, rather than all three.

### **Clear and Objective Language Exercise**

This exercise expands on the last exercise, and gives participants the opportunity to try their hands at modifying subjective phrases into objective language suitable for documentation. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to have participants partner with another participant to create new, objective statements from the phrases provided. The examples are very limited, so participants should be encouraged to add additional (imaginary) details to make the phrase into an objective sentence. Participants should be told that it is okay to eliminate words or change word order as needed. This exercise can also be done as a group shout out if time becomes limited.

**NOTE:**

Depending on the participants, and their level of engagement, the two exercises in this section could probably take almost an hour. If you plan to discuss other topics within the hour time frame, you may have to gently encourage participants to move on to other items being discussed if they become too focused on one item or idea. The decision to move on to other topics, or to allow the discussion of the two preceding exercises to take up the available time is up to you, and you may want to consider whether this discussion is productive enough to skip other topics planned; whether these exercises focus on significant needs; or whether it is important to move on to other items.

**TOPIC 3: APS Documentation** - (approximately time frame: 20-45 minutes)

**APS Documentation Exercise**

Have you noticed the variable length of this exercise? If you want your group to practice actually gleaning relevant information from the situations they encounter and documenting it objectively, then you may want to use more of your meeting time and expand the discussion of these two consecutive scenarios and how they could best be documented and limit or eliminate other activities. The activity is contained in **Attachment #3**, and directions are listed on the top of the page.

Depending on the number of participants that you have, dividing the group into 3-4 people (as was done in the in-person version of the original APS Case Documentation and Report Writing training) may not be possible. It may also be important to emphasize that participants should feel free to add factual information that they invent to form more clear and objective statements. Some possible modifications to this exercise (if you need to modify it) include: using only one of the two scenarios for participants to rewrite, doing this activity as a 'shout out' and/or using a different scenario for this activity. If you choose to use an altogether different scenario, you can create one that will allow for discussion of any problem areas that your workers are experiencing.

As with other exercises, it is important to point out that there are a multitude of correct answers, particularly since participants can make up their own details to use in objective documentation.

## Conclusion

In concluding any training, even a small one, it is important to take a few minutes at the end of the session to thank staff for participating, to encourage and allow them to comment on what they thought of the activities, and perhaps to briefly review the concepts that were touched on during the session. All feedback is good, even if it is not the feedback that you hoped for. If participants complain about the session, it may be helpful to ask them to clarify what they disliked. Planning for future sessions or trainings it would be valuable to know if the participants found the training too basic, too long, or objected that they are too busy with their casework to take time out for training.

If feedback seems negative, try not to be too discouraged. We hope that your feedback will be positive; however, even negative feedback tells you that the participants had enough feelings about the training to take the time to express them to you. If participants complain that the training was too elementary, then perhaps you can bump up the complexity for the next session. Ask for suggestions for the next meeting or session. If participants did not feel that the activities reflected enough of their day to day activities, you may consider asking them to bring in examples of situations that they had difficulty writing up or reading. Other documents that could be explored and discussed could include Public Guardian Referrals, Mental Health Referrals, or Caregiver Referrals. If staff does bring in their own examples, it will be important to avoid the appearance of belittling or criticizing the writer as this may have a counterproductive effect on staff sharing in the future.

We hope that this template has proven useful to you and to your staff. If you should have any suggestions or comments regarding this template, please contact Lori Delagrammatikas at [ldelagra@projects.sdsu.edu](mailto:ldelagra@projects.sdsu.edu). The work that you and your staff do is vitally important, and anything that can be done to enhance the understanding of the tasks required to do these difficult jobs can be beneficial. Thank you for utilizing this unit meeting template.

## Attachment 1

### Clear and Concise Documentation Exercise

Read the following narrative information carefully:

**The worker walked into the kitchen and observed mice scurrying under the cabinets when the light was turned on. Feces were all over the floor. The client's daughter said her mother liked mice but she didn't like people. Mrs. Jones said she was surprised that the mice stayed around with so little food in the house, and then she walked out of the room.**

Please rewrite the narrative so that it answers the following questions:

- a. Who was at the interview?
- b. Who is the client?
- c. Who is Mrs. Jones? And, who is the daughter?
- d. What type of feces was on the floor? How much feces was on the floor?
- e. Did the client have enough food? Is the client going hungry?
- f. Is the client ambulatory? Who walked out of the room?
- g. How old is the client?

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## Attachment 2

### Objective vs. Subjective Writing

**Subjective description** gives an interpretation of an observation.

Two people seeing the same event might be likely to give different subjective descriptions.

**Objective description** tells what was observed. Two people observing the same thing would probably give very similar objective descriptions.

**Are the following words objective or subjective?**

depressed	hostile	spineless
frightened	would not open door	dismissive
lonely	hit	uninterested
acted crazy	thin	obese
pacing	malnourished	drooled
grimaced	nervous	bruised
abused	sick	demented
sexually inappropriate	touches other's genitals	feverish
could not remember	smiled	disrespectful
hot tempered	mentally retarded	appeared confused
resistant	uncooperative	walked away
non-ambulatory	mean	bruised
delusional	stubborn	opinionated
dehydrated	alcoholic	addicted

**Attachment 3**  
**Clear and Objective Language Exercise**

Please read the following statements and rewrite them so they will be clear and objective. Be able to explain what was wrong with the original statement.

Example:

Client was filthy and disheveled.      Client's arms, legs, and face were caked with dirt. His shirt was stained and unbuttoned. His trousers hung down to his knees. There were urine stains on his pant legs. He had no socks on and only one shoe.

1. Client's behavior was inappropriate.
  
2. Daughter is paranoid.
  
3. Client is manipulative and is never satisfied.
  
4. Client was inappropriately dressed.
  
5. Son is an "alkie."
  
6. This is a dysfunctional family.

## Attachment 4 APS Documentation Activity

The following are two important portions of documentation on the client, “Mrs. J”.

### Activity Instructions:

1. Form small groups of 3-4 people, choose one person to be the recorder.
2. Read the background information on Mrs J.
3. Analyze the sample documentation under the headings – “Family Situation” & “Assessment of Social Functioning”
4. Identify any language that is unclear or subjective, and not fit for court.
5. Collaborate and rewrite the narratives, adding factual information as necessary for clarification and revising any inappropriate language.
6. Have the recorder write the final version – you have 20 minutes.

### Background information:

*Mrs. J is a German-born 89 year old widow who has severe dementia and has been hospitalized for 6 months. She has not been discharged because she cannot provide for her own care and nobody is available to help. Now that the application for Medi-Cal has been approved, she needs to be placed in a nursing home. An application for conservatorship is being processed and the request is that the Public Guardian be appointed, since neither the son nor the daughter is willing or appropriate to serve as their mother’s conservator.*

### Family Situation

Mrs. J has 2 children. The son lives in Virginia and has POA for financial matters. The hospital social worker called him frequently asking for his help in completing the Medi-Cal, but he kept avoiding her. When he finally came to California, he refused to pay any of his mother’s bills and wouldn’t meet with the Public Guardian. He seems like a real loser and this worker suspects that he might have exploited his mother. It’s possible that he used her credit card for motel stays in California, but he denies it. He said he cut up the credit cards but could not prove it. The daughter isn’t much better. She alleges that her brother is misusing her mother’s money but she herself had credit cards in her mother’s name, which she says she cut up. She says she really cares about her mother, but has not shown herself to be very responsible either. She is a

long haul truck driver and is never home. She is also very jealous of her brother, since Mrs. J has always treated him very special and wanted him to handle everything. She is afraid of her brother and can't stand up to him. Worker observed that when they were interviewed in the hospital, he is a bully and she acted really submissively.

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**Assessment of Social Functioning**

Mrs. J. was interviewed during her stay in the hospital. The first time she seemed okay but said it was too early to answer questions (it was 2 p.m.). She was probably trying to hide the fact that she didn't know the answers. She remembered some things about her childhood but said that she has 6 children. She has 2 children who are living and one who died a while ago. She talked about him as though he were still alive. Her short term memory is severely impaired. She seemed depressed and didn't care about the conservatorship.

At the second interview Mrs. J seemed really out of it but she wasn't depressed any more. She was inarticulate and needs help with all her ADLs.

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