

## Module 15 Case Documentation and Report Writing Workbook

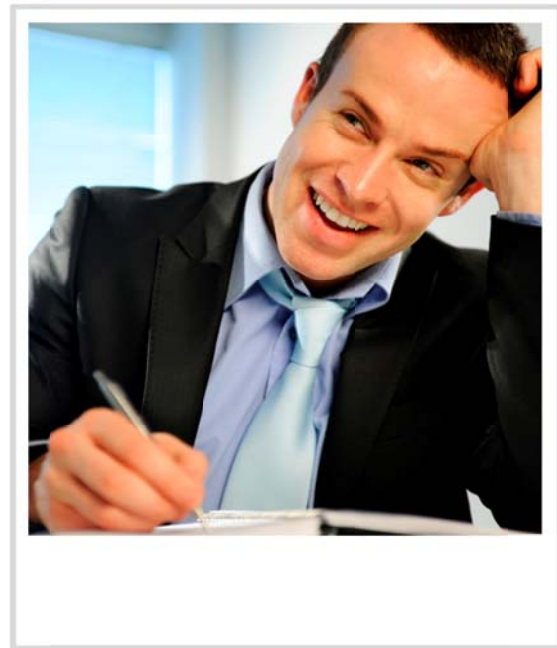
-Susan Castano

and has the elements which will stand up in court

**T**he Topic. Documentation in APS is a necessary evil. Many social workers do not like to document because they feel it takes time away from the “real work.” Because APS case records may be read by attorneys and judges, recordings need to be effectively organized and follow established formats. The activities in this workbook are very experiential and will give supervisors the opportunity to establish the “ground rules” up front before poor habits develop.

By the end of this training, participants will be able to:

- Describe the purpose of accurate, complete, and timely documentation
- Demonstrate the use of clear, concise, and objective language
- Identify at least 4 types of documentation equipment and describe their respective uses
- Discuss the importance of accurate recall and identify at least 3 memory improvement techniques
- Discuss confidentiality as it affects documentation relating to clients, law enforcement, and other professionals
- Discuss documentation needed for court including statements, evidence, and language
- Analyze a conservatorship report, identify poor documentation and rewrite report making sure it is clear, objective, and concise



### Supervisor Activities:

**T**he following pages contain a variety of activities that may be used with new workers and processed in individual or group supervision. Please read the Documentation Skills Trainer’s Manual as it will give you a wealth of didactic material and resources to support these activities

### Selected reading:

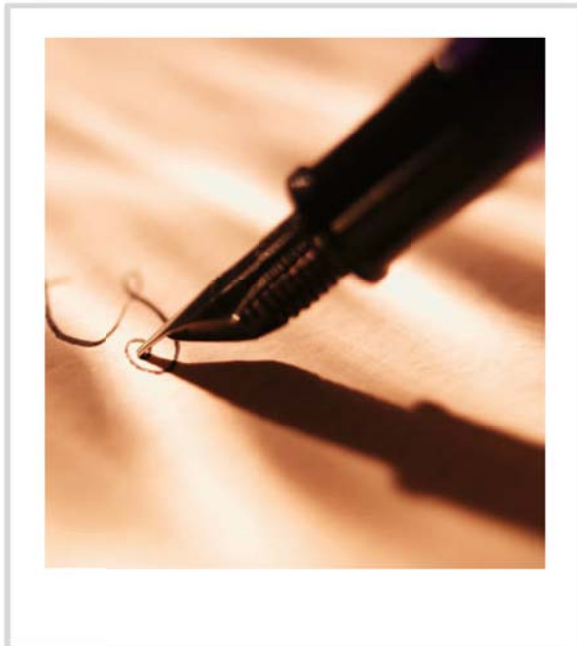
**H**walek, Melanie, PhD. “Proper Documentation: A Key Topic for Training Programs for Elder Abuse Workers” *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 1(3) (Haworth Press, 1989) pp 17-29.  
[http://www.informaworld.com/10.1300/J084v01n03\\_03](http://www.informaworld.com/10.1300/J084v01n03_03)

Discussion Questions:

**D**escribe the purpose of accurate, complete, and timely documentation

To set the stage for the documentation training, here are some questions you may ask new workers:

- **What has been your experience with documentation in you previous positions?** (Get a sense of what kind of documentation they did, how they felt about it)
- **What do you think some of the complaints are from APS workers about documentation?** (takes too much time away from providing “real” services, too many forms, too much duplication in the forms )



- **Why do you think it is important to document in APS?** *Answers may include: establish baseline data at the beginning of the assessment so improvement or deterioration can be measured, provide evidence in court, show that the case was handled properly, document service needs to be able to advocate for more funding, helps communication within the agency; helps to assist with substantiation decision or decision to take legal action, helps; identify service gap sand improve the quality of services to people in the community. Good documentation also helps when you are out of the office, whether in the field, out sick, or on vacation. If your coworkers and supervisor know what has been done on a case, it may prevent duplication of efforts when you are not in.*
- **How can good documentation assist with the helping relationship?** (In order to really help clients, we not only engage them, develop trusting relationships, etc. but to really service them, we need to build their case. Those details that are recorded will help you help them get what they need. And that’s what we want.

**Y**ou also should provide new workers with the Case Documentation requirements for your state. You may include your own discussion question appropriate to these requirements to make sure the worker understands them.

**On the Job Training:**

**D**escribe the purpose of accurate, complete, and timely documentation

This exercise can be done if new workers have NOT had the classroom training on documentation. Below included possible answers. A blank activity sheet follows.

Have new workers research the elements of accurate, complete, and timely as they refer to documentation. They can look at case records, discuss the questions with more experienced workers, or find their answers in APS articles or journals.



**Accurate:** What are the facts?

- What dates should be included (*all dates related to the case and the dates of any action taken on the case. When was the visit? Where did the visit take place- in the home, at a senior center, in the police station, at*

*the home of a neighbor or relative. All phone calls made by worker (and to whom) or received by worker (from whom) should be included, as well as identifying the caller, his/her title/agency or relationship to client. Dates of any with anyone involved with the case as well as the dates of all referrals made on behalf of the clients.*

- What names should be included (*client, perpetrator, significant other, family members, physicians, attorneys, etc. Also phone numbers, specialties, relationships should be included*)
- Language and wording issues (spelling, acronyms, abbreviations,

**Complete:** What paperwork should be included in the case record?

- *Required Forms*
- *Progress notes should be well written and clear, including dates, places, phone numbers, stakeholders, other agencies.*
- *Medical information, including documents received from physicians, nurses, hospitals... and any evaluations and affidavits should also be included.*
- *Legal Information - Records from law enforcement are important. If you don't have the documents, make sure you have the dates of restraining orders, protective orders, etc with all the information included. Also copies of eviction notices, wills, POAs,*

*relevant contracts, etc. should be included?*

- *Financial Information - Banking information such as account numbers, statements, deeds, transfers, names of charities and amounts donated.*

What should NOT be included in the case record?

- *Personal notes: notes during an interview should be transcribed into progress notes and carefully written, documenting what was observed and what people said*
- *Scraps of paper*
- *Alterations*
- *Irrelevant information or judgmental statements*

**Timely:** When should I document?

- *Document quotes and observations immediately*
- *If it isn't documented, it didn't happen*
- *Document in the car (not in front of the client's home) or someplace quiet after the visit. The longer one waits, the more likely one forgets.*

What should be dated?

- *Home visits*
- *Office visits*
- *Visits to other locations to see client or on behalf of client*
- *Phone calls*
- *Emails*
- *Photographs/audiotapes (when and where they were taken)*

**On the Job Training:**

Identify at least 4 types of documentation equipment and describe their respective uses



The types of equipment discussed this module include: camera, computer, body map, field book, video, and tape recorder. There are handouts on photography (#11) and body maps (# 12) in the 15 participant manual.

New workers need to know:

- What equipment is available to them
- What is expected of them regarding the care/use of specific equipment
- How certain types of equipment may be used as evidence in building a case for court or for prosecution

Each APS program has access to/uses different equipment and has different protocols. Review your own equipment protocols and share them with the new staff. If the handouts are helpful, use them.

Ways to reinforce this skill

- Have experienced workers demonstrate the use of the equipment during a staff meeting
- Have new workers shadow experienced workers in the field when equipment is being used
- Bring in an expert to discuss equipment techniques for a staff meeting
- Use handouts provided in this training module or develop your own handouts specific to your program

**Accurate, Complete, and Timely Documentation**

**R**esearch the elements of accurate, complete, and timely as they refer to documentation and answer the following questions. You may look at case records, discuss the questions with more experienced workers, or find answers in APS articles or journals.

What type of facts should be included?

What paperwork should be included in the case record?

What should NOT be included in the case record?

When should I document?

What should be dated?

Case Vignette:

**D**emonstrate the use of clear, concise, and objective language

Review the content of clear, concise and objective language.

- *Document what you saw, heard, and smelled: direct observation, not your assumptions or feelings about what you saw.*
- *Using quotes helps you state clearly what you heard, rather than your interpretation of what you heard.*
- *Medical diagnoses, financial information, legal information such as POA – should be obtained by the professionals that have the authority to do it. That information can be quoted or copies of hospital, medical, legal and bank records can and probably should be part of the case record whenever possible.*
- *Language is clear and can be understood by any reader (who is allowed access, of course).*
- *Be very careful when incorporating any acronym... make sure you clarify it somehow, and do not use lingo as part of the case record.*
- *To write objectively, we need to be aware of our own values and opinions, what is “right” for you may not be “right” for someone else. What is “inappropriate behavior” to you may seem very appropriate to others. So we need to pay attention to situations that “push our buttons” so we will not interpret someone’s actions in a particular way, maybe even leading to not providing service or providing too much service, depending on our feelings*
- *Do not use judgmental, inflammatory, or “loaded” words : examples, filthy, dysfunctional, crazy, drunk, controlling, manipulative*
- *Using the words “seems” and “appears” can be helpful... but at the same time you should describe what lead you to that “conclusion.”*
- *Get to the point, by answering the who, what, where, how, why questions that are pertinent to the assessment, investigation, substantiation, and termination of the case.*
- *Make sure the information being documented is relevant to the case.*

Share the following documentation vignettes and have them identify what is unclear, not factual, judgmental, or irrelevant.

2/13/11: Home visit to Mary Smith. She had a blue dress that was a bit too long and her hair was straggly. She smelled awful and couldn't answer any of my questions. She had a dog and two cats. There were feces on the floor. She said her daughter comes every week and takes care of things. (I have spoken with the daughter and she was nasty with me on the phone.) I did not see food in the refrigerator, only a can of beer and some bread. I offered her home delivered meals but she said she doesn't like the food they bring. There was a bottle of medication on the table prescribed by Dr. Gottlieb.



**Observation Activity:** Demonstrate the use of clear, concise, and objective language

Observation Activity - Handout 5

Facts - things for which there are verification

Observations- things the worker sees, hears, or smells for which there are no independent verification.

Appearance

Behaviors

Conversations

Inferences - go beyond what is directly observed, conclusions which entail some degree of risk or uncertainty

Interpretations - what the combined information means to the worker, i.e., a professional opinion

**E**xplain that facts are verifiable, but observations are what they see, hear, smell which may not be independently verifiable. Therefore they must document accurately exactly what they see, here and smell. Using inferences can be risky because they imply a conclusion that is reached which goes beyond what is observed. We can use the words “seem” or “appear” in those cases. Interpretations of what the information means to THEM can be considered a professional opinion – as long as it is based on facts and knowledge rather than their personal biases and need to reach a particular conclusion quickly (also known as exaggeration).

Tell them it is very important for them to be able to tell the difference between fact and opinion and to make sure that their documentation is factual. They need to recognize the danger for misunderstanding and ineffective communication when we treat opinions as though they were facts.

Ask: should we trust statements of fact the same as statements of opinion? Why not?

**Group activity** (part of a staff meeting)

Have 3 index cards with word “anger” on them. Give to 3 more experienced workers. Ask each one to come act out what is on the card. Ask new workers to guess what the emotion was. Talk about the differences in how each one expressed anger. This is



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an example of how our own perceptions (and comfort zone) may play out when documenting what we see.

### **Individual Activity** (done in supervision)

Think of an emotion you (the supervisor) would like to portray. Stay very quiet at first. Then take a large object such as a book and throw it loudly onto the floor. Have the worker document exactly what they saw. If they described an emotion, ask them what made them think it was that emotion... and describe what emotion you were portraying. Discuss the documentation and check for fact, opinion, objectivity, and relevance.

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**Written Exercise:** Demonstrate the use of clear, concise, and objective language

Read the following statements and rewrite them so they are clear, factual, objective, and concise, adding information to support the observations.

1. Client was inappropriately dressed.
2. Daughter was very controlling and made the client afraid to speak.
3. Client was depressed and cried a lot.
4. This family is enmeshed and will not respond to therapy.
5. Son is mooching off his mother. He hasn't worked in years.
6. Caregiver has issues and treats the client very poorly.

Note: If you have **NOT** had the classroom training, you may also do the Case Record Diet Exercise, handout # 8 from the Module 15 Participant Manual.

**Experiential Activity:**

**D**iscuss the importance of accurate recall and identify at least 3 memory improvement techniques

This activity is best done as part of a staff meeting to get feedback and sharing from a variety of individuals. If done with a large group, you may use the activity from the training module.

Instructions: Before the meeting select 15-20 small items that can be found in an APS household. These could include a prescription bottle (with name and dose written on it), an over the counter drug, a knife, a pet (stuffed, of course), an insect (plastic cockroach?), stuffed mouse, doilies, broken eyeglasses, a piece of rotten/fresh food, playing cards, hearing aide, knitting needles, matches, dirty clothing, a plant, social security check, cash, a beer can, etc- just make sure there are a variety and some are significant and should be noticed. Make a list of all the items for your reference.

Put all the items in a blanket or sheet, so they cannot be seen by the participants and put the closed blanket on a table in the front of the room. Ask participants to come around the table. Tell participants that when they go into a client's home, there will be a lot to notice other than the client. The cues in the environment may give them information which will help with their assessment. It is important for them to notice and remember what they observed.

Tell them that in the blanket are \_\_\_\_ number of items that they might see in a client's home. Tell them you will open the blanket and give them **one minute no more to observe the items in the blanket. After one minute, quickly close up the blanket and ask participants to take their seats. Then ask them to list everything they saw. Give them a few minutes.**



Ask if anyone got all \_\_\_\_ (number) correct? Then ask them what they found and write all items on flip chart. Check against your master list to see if anything was missing. Discuss reasons for missing things, ask them which items stood out for them, comment how different items may have different meaning to different people.

Questions for Discussion:

**D**iscuss the importance of accurate recall and identify at least 3 memory improvement techniques

1. **Why is memory important in APS?** (*on a home visit we are confronted with lots of information for the case. Often we only get one chance so we need to be able to remember details of what we observed. There are many details when we are building a case. We need to remember and document as many as possible, especially direct quotes. Often we can't take extensive notes while at the client's home, either because we don't want to interfere with the rapport building process or because the client is fearful or suspicious. We have to be able to remember as many details as possible so we can write them down later*)



2. **What do you do/ can you do to help improve your memory?** (*physical exercise, brain exercise such as crosswords, scrabble, stress management, good sleep habits, good nutrition*)

3. **What tricks do you use to increase your memory?**

Share handouts # 9 and #10. Ask :

- Do you use any of the techniques described in the handouts? If so, which ones?
- Are there any techniques you plan on trying?

## Handout 9

**G**eneral guidelines to improve memory

In addition to exercising your brain, there are some basic things you can do to improve your ability to retain and retrieve memories:

1. Pay attention. You can't remember something if you never learned it, and you can't learn something – that is, encode it into your brain – if you don't pay enough attention to it. It takes about eight seconds of intent focus to process a piece of information through your hippocampus and into the appropriate memory center. So, no multitasking when you need to concentrate! If you distract easily, try to receive information in a quiet place where you won't be interrupted.
2. Tailor information acquisition to your learning style. Most people are visual learners; they learn best by reading or otherwise seeing what it is they have to know. But some are auditory learners who learn better by listening. They might benefit by recording information they need and listening to it until they remember it.
3. Involve as many senses as possible. Even if you're a visual learner, read out loud what you want to remember. (If you can recite it rhythmically, even better.) Try to relate information to colors, textures, smells and tastes. The physical act of rewriting information can help imprint it onto your brain.
4. Relate information to what you already know. Connect new data to information you already remember, whether it's new material that builds on previous knowledge, or something as simple as an address of someone who lives on a street where you already know someone.
5. Organize information. Write things down in address books and datebooks and on calendars; take notes on more complex material and reorganize the notes into categories later. Use both words and pictures in learning information.
6. Understand and be able to interpret complex material. For more complex material, focus on understanding basic ideas rather than memorizing isolated details. Be able to explain it to someone else in your own words.
7. Rehearse information frequently and “over-learn”. Review what you've learned the same day you learn it, and at intervals thereafter. What researchers call “spaced rehearsal” is more effective than “cramming.” If you're able to “over-learn” information so that recalling it becomes second nature, so much the better.
8. Be motivated and keep a positive attitude. Tell yourself that you want to learn what you need to remember, and that you can learn and remember it. Telling yourself you have a bad memory actually hampers the ability of your brain to remember, while positive mental feedback sets up an expectation of success.

## Handout 10

**M**nemonic devices to improve memory

The three fundamental principles underlying the use of mnemonics are imagination, association and location. Working together, you can use these principles to generate powerful mnemonic systems.

**Imagination:** is what you use to create and strengthen the associations needed to create effective mnemonics. Your imagination is what you use to create mnemonics that are potent for you. The more strongly you imagine and visualize a situation, the more effectively it will stick in your mind for later recall. The imagery you use in your mnemonics can be as violent, vivid, or sensual as you like, as long as it helps you to remember.

**Association:** this is the method by which you link a thing to be remembered to a way of remembering it. You can create associations by:

- Placing things on top of each other
- Crashing things together
- Merging images together
- Wrapping them around each other
- Rotating them around each other or having them dancing together
- Linking them using the same color, smell, shape, or feeling

As an example, you might link the number 1 with a goldfish by visualizing a 1-shaped spear being used to spear it.

**Location:** gives you two things – first, a coherent context into which you can place information so that it hangs together. Second, a way of separating one mnemonic from another. By setting one mnemonic in a particular town, I can separate it from a similar mnemonic set in a city. For example, by setting one in Wimbledon and another similar mnemonic with images of Manhattan, we can separate them with no danger of confusion. You can build the flavors and atmosphere of these places into your mnemonics to strengthen the feeling of location.

Common types of mnemonic devices include:

1. Visual images.
2. Sentences in which the first letter of each word is part of or represents the initial of what you want to remember.

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3. Acronyms, which are initials that creates pronounceable words.
4. Rhymes and alliteration:
5. Jokes or even off-color associations using facts, figures, and names you need to recall, because funny or peculiar things are easier to remember than mundane images.
6. “Chunking” information; arranging a long list in smaller units or categories that are easier to remember.
7. “Method of loci”: You associate each part of what you have to remember with a landmark in a route you know well, such as your commute to work.

**Case Consultation:**

**D**iscuss confidentiality as it affects documentation relating to clients, law enforcement, and other professionals

Distribute and discuss your APS policy regarding confidentiality.

When discussing their documentation on cases in individual supervision, you may use the following guidelines to make sure that workers understand the confidentiality rules

- Check the wording of the documentation for statements that may have been exaggerated or minimized. Explore what worker wanted to achieve by distorting the documentation... was it to protect the client at any cost, was it to protect the worker's liability. Discuss the danger of biased documentation. Ask how

that type of information may come back to haunt them. Handout # 13 may be helpful to share

- Ask if that documentation will be shared with anyone - who is allowed access to it and why.
- Ask who may need to scrutinize this documentation... and share any concerns about the way the material has been organized or documented, asking worker what could be improved.
- Explain that some of the complaints about APS include lack of sharing information on the outcome of an investigation. Ask how they would explain this to a referral source- a family member, neighbor, attorney, another agency

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**Observation and Writing Activity:**

**D**iscuss documentation needed for court including statements, evidence, and language.

The following page contains a photo of a hoarder house. Have the worker look at the photo and document her/his observations in a clear, objective, and concise manner. Tell the worker that this photo is the evidence that will be presented in court.

If you are doing this activity with one worker, review the documentation summary with the worker providing feedback on the accuracy, objectivity, and relevance of what is written. If there is more than one worker, workers can exchange documentation and provide feedback to each other... make sure, you point out items that they miss.





**Transfer of Learning Activity:**

Identify poor documentation and rewrite report making sure it is clear, objective, and concise and has the elements which will stand up in court

Choose a client interview that you either conducted or observed. Photocopy and redact your documentation of that interview.

Using the TOL evaluation form (below), schedule a time to sit down with your supervisor and complete questions 1-9. Discuss the worker's strengths (questions scored "Yes") and identified areas of improvement (questions scored as "No" or "N/C").

Identified strengths (items answered "Yes"):

Areas identified for improvement (items answered "No or N/C"):

	Yes No N/C
1. The social worker documented key information relevant to the case (i.e. Who, What, When & Where).	
2. The social worker used clear, concise and objective language to document the case.	
3. The social worker documented opinion as opinion (e.g. "In my opinion this client needs...").	
4. The social worker used only objective language (If subjective language was used, it was clearly noted).	
5. The social worker documented what he/she observed using sight, sound and smell.	
6. The social worker displayed the clear use of pronouns.	
7. The social worker displayed the appropriate use of abbreviations and acronyms.	
8. Client confidentiality as it relates to documentation was observed by the social worker.	
9. The documentation follows the recommended use of victim/perpetrator statements, evidence and language required for court reporting (e.g. uses "victim states" or "AP states", builds case on fact, writes in a way to refresh the memory. Avoids use of - labels, the word "story", and "victim alleges")	