

Tips for Court Report Writing

First and foremost, the Court report should be written as if ANYONE could read the document: birth parents, attorneys, Judge, child/youth, Social Worker, co-CASAs. If you don't feel comfortable saying something directly to anyone that could read this document, consider a different way of sharing the information-work with your Supervisor on wording. A well-crafted Court report includes the observations of many people including the youth, Social Worker, therapist, teachers, caregiver and if possible, birth parents.

The report is about a child's strengths and challenges; it's not about the parents. For example, in a recommendation, family therapy could be recommended, but not a parenting class or psychological evaluation for the parent.

Try not to sanitize or paraphrase quotes, use quotations and write what people say if it is meaningful and only when it supports the report. Exception: Inform service providers that you want to quote them for a Court report or if they would rather you paraphrase.

If in the first draft there is language used that strikes emotions, we may suggest a different way to phrase it. Remember words means things, and some words can hurt.

Vulgarity is okay if it is in quote; otherwise, it is best to use your own voice when sharing information. You are writing from the first person, and therefore, if it's your opinion, use "I" statements, if it's information reported by someone else, definitely indicate who told you the information. Information can be shared if you were told verbally.

Supervisors will fix typos and grammar when reviewing your first draft-they will highlight suggestions and send back to Advocate. So you don't have to write a perfect report the first draft.

Avoid telling anyone how to do their job.

Address every section in the report.

Common Sections of Report to enhance:

INTRO Section: Shed light on whom this child/youth is and who they are in the world. It is a great time to say some positive things about their character, their skills, their dreams, their interests, etc.

EDUCATION Section: Address the action steps taken to ensure they are on track to promote to the next grade or graduate; share examples of how caregiver, birth parent, Foster Ed, and/or you are involved with supporting their education.

RELATIONSHIP Section: Children's relationship with caregivers and relationship with peers, siblings, or anyone they might know can be mentioned here. With Birth to Five, note social-emotional experiences.

MENTAL HEALTH/PHYSICAL HEALTH Section: Address mental health issues and strengths as observed by the CASA and reported by others-and if possible, reported by the youth. Mention something about their physical well-being.

PERMANENCY Section: When children are in a foster home, address future planning and any efforts being made regarding the plan if they are going home or if they are not going home. You will most likely need to speak to the Social Worker to gather this information.

ASSESSMENT Section: This is the last section where you can summarize everything you wrote at the beginning. You should try not to introduce anything new. You can also add your opinion of what's working and what Advocacy needs remain. The other sections should only be facts and information that you have learned from other people or witnessed.

Final Notes:

The date of hearing is the actual date of the Court hearing, not the date you are writing the report. If you have a copy of your Order of Assignment, the DP # is listed on it; otherwise, your Supervisor will enter that for you.

Ask your Supervisor what your total hours are on the case if you don't know. When naming people, just give their title or role, not their actual name.

Make sure to connect with Social Worker and other professionals involved to get their perspective-best to make attempt a month in advance of writing the report. You can always provide an update if you learn anything new once you are in Court at the actual hearing.

A strength-based report which focuses on the positive and encouraging examples of the child's life can have a very strong impact on how people think about the child. This report will live in the child's file forever. Reminder: The child/youth can access this report when they turn 18 and read every document in their file. Most reports will talk about all the problems, issues, trouble in their life, your report can make a big difference in balancing out the impression of the child and possibly, the child's self-impression.

Advocate Supervisors will provide any support you need to craft your report.