

Saying it Differently: Effective Communication through Writing

Child Advocate Program of Pierce County

Disclaimer

This is not a training on sentence structure, grammar, etc. We are assuming you know where a period goes.

Introduction and Objectives

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Who is in the room?

What are we going to be covering?

- Writing objectively and persuasively
- Tailor your communication
- Write concisely
- Tips for court report writing and emails

Write
Objectively

Objective vs. Subjective

- Observable
- Fact-based
- Backed up by evidence
- Neutral
- Unbiased
- Assumption-driven
- Opinion-based
- Biased
- Built upon individual interpretation

Know your
audience

EXAMPLES

Subjective v. Objective

Subjective:
Conclusions drawn by writer

Objective:
Facts listed by writer

Mother was not interested in attending her class.

Mother attended two out of the ten classes.

Father was angry and uncooperative.

Father was yelling and banging the table during the meeting. He refused to answer questions directly and stormed out of the meeting before it ended.

The child was upset that the mother missed the visit.

When the mother missed the visit, the child cried and said, I miss my mommy.

Let's practice...

**saying it
differently**



Why can subjective writing cause problems?

It is difficult to defend and prove subjective statements.

Attorneys may challenge any subjective statements.

Subjective language inflames people!

Subjective writing could put the focus on you, away from the child's best interest.

What is the point of writing objectively?

Objectivity lends credibility to the entire report

Objectivity helps to eliminate bias and assumptions

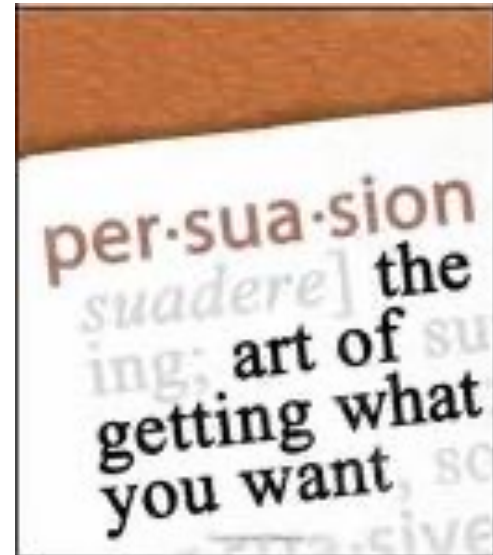
You can use data

Your duty as an Advocate is to present the most fact-based information available-- you should not make sweeping conclusions

Writing Persuasively

Persuasive writing is...

Presenting reasons and facts to influence action or thought.



Let's practice...

**Evaluating
persuasiveness**

REPORT WRITING



Court Report Writing Tips

- Child-focused and family-centered (include a picture)
- Use the same voice (active v. passive)
- Be consistent, concise and FACT BASED
- Be organized
- Have a balanced viewpoint (strengths and deficits)
- Identify all sources of information, cite things correctly
- Don't make personal judgments, have CULTURAL AWARENESS
- Refrain from gushing about the foster/relative placement, when writing about placement you are addressing safety, well being and child's needs being met.
- If you make a recommendation, it should be clear to the reader within the body of your report why that recommendation is being made

Keep it Simple

“The children did not complete their homework during visitation,” instead of, “There were several visitations where the children did not complete their required homework.”

“because” instead of “due to the fact that”

Records” instead of “past records”

Use a thesaurus wisely



Nathan Usher

@thenatewolf

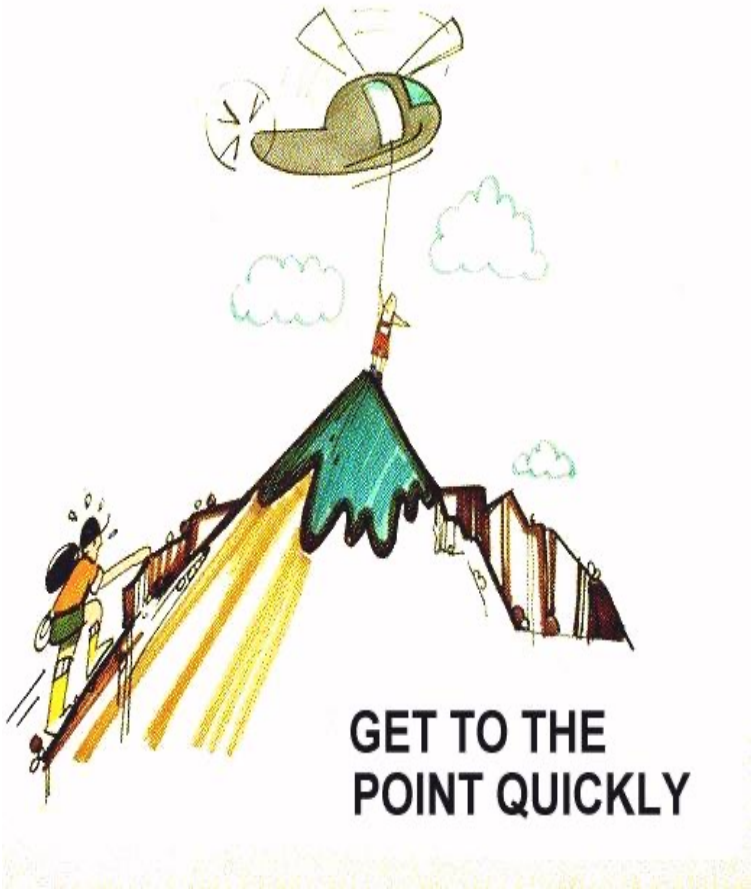
Following

ME: Why don't you guys want to hang out anymore?

FRIEND: Well ever since you got that thesaurus...

ME: Is it my perspicacity? My panache?

Emails



Email Writing: How To Do It Better

- Think about your message before you write it (write without emotion)
- Keep the message concise and focused (avoid really long emails when possible). Use paragraphs
- Proofread before hitting send
- Be professional
- When in doubt have your coordinator review email first
- USE THE SUBJECT LINE- make it meaningful
- Check email regularly/daily and respond to emails promptly
- When reading an EMAIL STREAM: read all emails in stream before responding and double check who is in the stream and use REPLY ALL (if appropriate) or remove people who you cannot share information with.
- Avoid Attachments (if possible)

Avoid attachments

Rather than attaching a file that your reader will have to download and open in a separate program, you will probably get faster results if you simply copy and paste the most important part of the document into the body of your message.

3.13 The specific visitation plan between the child(ren) and father shall be:

as set forth in the visitation attachment.

as follows:

Visits are 1 time per week for 2-4 ^{hours} supervised for Father. Visits maybe expanded upon agreement of social worker and GAL.

Email etiquette example:

Ms. Smith,

I emailed you on March 20th, March 23rd and March 24th and you have NOT replied! I need you to tell me what the parents are doing and when visits are. Did mom do her psychological eval. yet? I heard you didn't make the referral yet – have you done that? Also, did Johnny get to the doctor? The foster mom said that she didn't have a copy of his medical coupon yet – did you get that straightened out? I also need copies of all the visitation notes and the UA results for mom. Please send those ASAP as I need to write my report. I know you are busy but this is information I need. 😊

Jane

Sue's Advocate

Or...

Hello Mary,

I wanted to let you know I am planning to go visit the children next Thursday at 3:00 pm. If you haven't been to the home this month, it might be nice for us to go together – I would be happy to pick you up.

It will be helpful to see mom's psychological evaluation; do you know if there is any progress on that?

Also, maybe there is a time I could stop by your office and make copies of the visitation notes and mom's UAs. Let me know.

I look forward to working with you!

Jane


Sue's Advocate

What was
different?

REMEMBER...

Whenever you are putting something in writing to give/send to someone else, you need to always ask yourself...

- What is the purpose?
- What do I want to accomplish?
- How will this affect the child?
- How will it be perceived by others?
(be your own devil's advocate)



Questions?