



# ADVOCACY THROUGH REPORT WRITING

Washington Child Advocate Program Conference 2023

INTRODUCTION  
AND OBJECTIVES

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Who am I?

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Who is in the room?

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What do you want to learn?

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What will be covered?

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Disclaimer

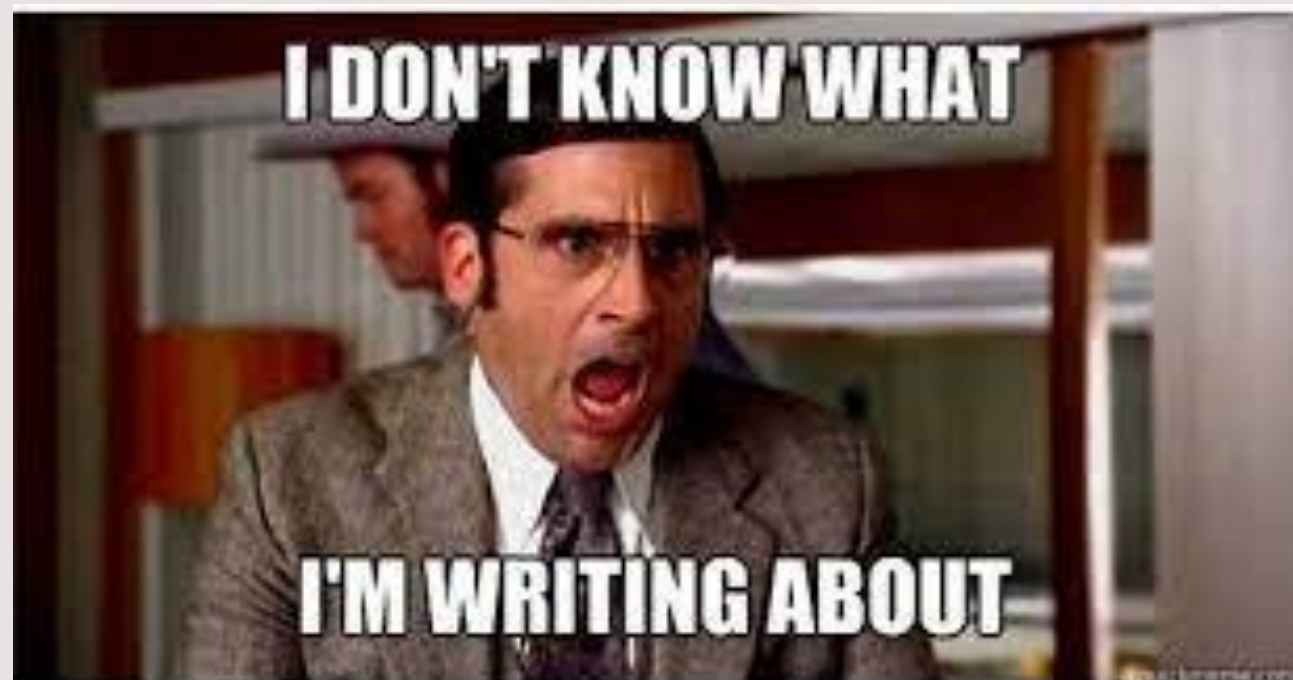
COURT  
REPORTS:  
WHY ARE  
THEY  
IMPORTANT?

They are required by the RCWs.

They provide information to the Court.

They are a record of your work as an Advocate and a record of the case.

What else?



# PREPARATION IS IMPORTANT

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REVIEW THE LAST  
COURT ORDER



REVIEW YOUR FILE  
AND NOTES



HAVE THE SPACE/TIME  
TO WORK

# HOW DO YOU ADVOCATE THROUGH WRITING?

It's about what you write.

It's about how you write.

Writing is only good for its rightness to purpose. Without purpose you can still string together aimless sentences that sound good, but it won't get the point across.

↳ Writing with Impact

# WRITE WITH IMPACT

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Why are you writing?

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Who are you writing for? (And what do they already know?)

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What format are you writing in?

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Where/When/How will your writing be distributed?

what are other  
words for  
objectively?



fairly, impartially,  
dispassionately, equitably,  
justly, without prejudice,  
with an open mind



Thesaurus.plus

what are other  
words for  
persuasively?



cogently, earnestly, forcefully,  
conclusively, convincingly,  
compellingly, vigorously,  
eagerly, hastily, frantically



Thesaurus.plus

# WRITING OBJECTIVELY AND PERSUASIVELY



# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

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Fact-Based

Observable

Unbiased

Credible

Cite sources

Use data

Connect the  
dots

What do you  
want the  
reader to do?

# OBJECTIVE WRITING

YOU ARE WRITING  
ABOUT VISITS GOING  
WELL.

- Visits for Mr. Barnes are going well, and Thomas likes visiting with his dad.
- Mr. Barnes stays engaged with Thomas during visits and Thomas also seems to enjoy them. Visits are going well.
- Mr. Barnes has been visiting, three (3) times per week, for 3 hours monitored. He has not missed any visits and the visit supervisor reports no safety concerns. This advocate has reviewed all visit notes and observed four (4) visits. When Thomas arrives for the visit, he runs to his dad for a hug. During visits Mr. Barnes brings age-appropriate activities and snacks; and remains engaged with Thomas throughout the visit.

# OBJECTIVE WRITING

YOU ARE WRITING  
ABOUT A CHILD  
WHO AS MOVED  
MULTIPLE TIMES.

- Sarah is a difficult child and has had to be moved many times this review period.
- Sarah has been unsafe in her foster homes and has been moved three (3) times this review period.
- Sarah has had to be moved three (3) times during this review period, she is now in her fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) foster home. All prior foster parents reported that Sarah punched holes in their walls, cut herself, and tried to runaway.

# PERSUASIVE WRITING

## YOU WANT TO RECOMMEND A PARENTING SERVICE FOR VISITS

<p>OBJECTIVE WRITING</p> <p>YOU ARE WRITING ABOUT VISITS GOING WELL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visits for Mr. Barnes are going well, and Thomas likes visiting with his dad.</li><li>• Mr. Barnes stays engaged with Thomas during visits and Thomas also seems to enjoy them. Visits are going well.</li><li>• Mr. Barnes has been visiting three (3) times per week, for 3 hours monitored. He has not missed any visits and the visit supervisor reports no safety concerns. This advocate has reviewed all visit notes and observed four (4) visits. When Thomas arrives for the visit, he runs to his dad for a hug. During visits Mr. Barnes brings age-appropriate activities and snacks; and remains engaged with Thomas throughout the visit.</li></ul>
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- Mr. Barnes should have hands on parenting during visits.
- During visits, Mr. Barnes struggles with staying engaged and should have a parenting service.
- During visits, Mr. Barnes sits on the couch while Thomas plays by himself in the corner. Mr. Barnes will call Thomas over to the couch, but Thomas does not always respond. Mr. Barnes has shared with this Advocate that he is not sure what to do with a 3-year-old. This Advocate believes a parenting coach could help Mr. Barnes engage during visits.

# PERSUASIVE WRITING

YOU WANT TO  
RECOMMEND  
COUNSELING FOR  
A CHILD OCCUR  
OUTSIDE SCHOOL  
HOURS.

- Sarah should have counseling when she is not in school.
- Sarah is struggling and needs counseling. She should not have to miss school to attend any counseling sessions.
- Sarah has shared with this advocate that she would like to be able to talk with a counselor. Her teachers and caregivers report that she has been having a hard time regulating her emotions at home and school, often bursting into tears or slamming doors. Sarah is behind in 3 of her 6 classes, and while she struggles in her classes, she reports a supportive peer group at school. This advocate recommends that Sarah be referred for counseling, and that appointments are scheduled outside school hours.



QUESTIONS?

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE  
REPORTS  
AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS



# KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE





There is  
a story behind  
every person.

There is  
a reason why they are  
the way they are.  
Think about that,  
and respect them  
for who they are.  
- marcandangel

CONSIDER  
EACH CASE  
UNIQUELY

# CHILD FOCUSED AND FAMILY CENTERED

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Keep the child's  
best interest at the  
forefront.

What is the child's  
perspective?

Understand the  
family's current  
situation, strengths,  
needs, etc.

Respect a family's  
culture

Pictures



# TACT AND TONE MATTER

- Check for negative emotion
- Use clear, non-judgmental language
- Eliminate opinions; add fact
- Check for bias/personal judgments
- Accuracy matters as does delivery
- Who is reading the report- present/future

# BALANCED VIEWPOINT

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Strength based and trauma informed

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Discuss the positive and the negative

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Consider a “compliment sandwich”

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“Here’s some good news **and** here’s some more good news, **but** here’s some bad news... **therefore** we need to...”

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Acknowledge progress

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Check for bias

Autocorrect  
has become  
my worst  
enema.



# GRAMMAR MATTERS

01

Keep it  
simple/crisp

02

Use an  
active voice

03

Straight  
forward  
sentences

04

Watch your  
modifiers

05

Delete  
unnecessary  
prepositions

06

Use  
paragraphs  
and  
punctuation

## GRAMMAR TIPS

### Long Sentences v. Short sentences

- Convey complex information (LS)
- Explain a series of events (LS)
- Add variety to your writing (LS)
- Best for important points (SS)
- Provide strong emphasis (SS)

Weak/Empty	Modifier	Prepositions
Rarely	Of	
Very	To	
So	On	
Kind of		
Basically		
Fretty		

The opinion of the evaluator is basically that mom needs parent coaching.

The evaluator recommends parent coaching for mom.

## EXAMPLES

- Mabel was hesitant to speak with the newly assigned SW and this GAL at our first visit on 08/21/2023. She did agree to show us her room and then became more talkative
- Mabel hesitated to speak with the newly assigned SW and this GAL at our first visit on 08/21/2023. However, she was talkative after showing us her room.
- Medically there are no concerns for Kevin. Kevin does wear glasses. Caregiver reports he is up to date on medical and dental. Kevin did have a hand injury in the past that occasionally bothers him, and this GAL has asked that the caregiver follow up with his primary care physician on that matter.
- Kevin wears glasses and his caregiver reports his medical and dental are current. Kevin had a past hand injury, that occasionally bothers him, and this GAL has asked the caregiver to follow up with his primary care physician.

# CONNECT THE PIECES



- Recommendations should:
  - *Be backed up by the contents of your report.*
  - *Match the type of hearing.*
  - *Not be a surprise to the parties.*
  - *Be easy to find.*
- Don't move the finish line.
- Offer other possible solutions- Be Creative.

# EDIT YOUR REPORT

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Give yourself time -  
it is a process



Organization



Formatting



Be concise



Read out loud



Review it through the  
lens of another party



Use your supervisor-  
seek feedback



# YOU'RE STUCK- NOW WHAT?



- Just start writing
- Ditch the computer and write with pen and paper
- Read it out loud
- Take a break
- Ask for help



QUESTIONS?



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# SOURCES

## OUTSIDE OF EXPERIENCE

- LinkedIn Learnings:
  - *What's the So What." Writing Clearly for a Business Audience*
  - *Writing with Impact*
  - *Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing*
- Writing it Right- CASALA.org
- Report Writing- CASA of Forsyth County
- Court Report Writing Webinar – CASA Fresno & Madera Counties

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Pretty	

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