

Technical Writing for Social Work Course Syllabus

COURSE INFORMATION

Number: SCWK 355
Credits: 2
Pre-requisites: ENGL 202; SCWK 201
Quarter offered: Winter

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Ann Gowen
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Office hours: As posted

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Technical Writing for Social Work provides training in technical writing required by many social services agencies for effective service delivery and caseload management. [Writing course]

For effective service delivery and caseload management in practice settings, social workers must be able to effectively and accurately document services and interventions offered to clients and demonstrate through case records client progress, worker responsibility, agency requirements and legal accountability. The general objective of this course is to help students develop the range of writing skills needed in the delivery of social work services in various agency settings. An important part of the course will be to examine the impact of social/political (*macro*) factors on the required and routine documentation, technical writing and record keeping process of the individual social worker (managed care, regulatory requirements, funding patterns, changes in funding patterns, legal and policy changes, requirements specific to local jurisdictions and court systems, etc.) Students will also learn how to document activities that occur in the agency setting such as developing meeting agendas, recording meeting minutes, writing letters to other helping professionals and developing intake assessments and case summaries. Class lectures, discussion and activities will examine the legal and ethical aspects of documentation. Students will be reminded of the important relationship between research and practice, as well as the importance of remaining current and aware of policy, practice, funding and legal changes that impact client service provision and documentation practices. Students will learn to develop appropriate client goals and to provide written assessments of client strengths, needs and progress. Students will be given the opportunity to review and practice using forms and formats specific to state, local and tribal agencies.

This course will concentrate on accurate, efficient written skill development that meets the needs and standards of agency policy, administrative rules and legal standards. Casework and time management will be included to insure proficiency in all aspects of case management and case recording. The course will focus on the accuracy of case notes, intake forms, court reports, assessments, and interventions and other writing requirements in the field of Social Work.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of the course, participants will be able to:

General Course Objectives:

1. Demonstrate proficiency in the use of technical writing in social work settings as it relates to accountability, reimbursement, and legal liability.

Measured by written summary of the social work agency guest presentation.

(P.O. 1, 2, 12)

2. Produce accurate and professional quality case records.

Measured by completion of the five technical writing assignments: intake/assessment, case documentation, service referral, and report to the court and case summary; development of an individual student resource manual. (P.O. 2, 12)

3. Demonstrate proficiency in composing an agency specific case plan/treatment plan based on an accurate client assessment.

Measured by completion of a written client assessment and written treatment or case plan. (P.O. 2, 3, 7, 12)

Critical Thinking Objectives:

4. Apply critical thinking skills in the analysis and evaluation of a client interview and production of a client assessment.

Measured by a written client assessment based on classmate interview from a client scenario, and completion of a written client intake and assessment specific to a social services agency standard. (P.O. 1, 2, 7 12)

Cultural Objectives:

5. Describe potential cultural barriers in social work practice interactions among and between workers, clients, and agencies.

Measured by completion of two- page reaction paper on guest speaker. (P.O. 3, 4, 15)

6. Demonstrate an understanding of legal and cultural considerations in client assessment.

Measured by completion of one written report to court.

(P. O. 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 15)

7. Identify laws affecting the delivery of services in Native American and Non-Native social work agencies.

Measured by, completion of a review of an on-line article related to the impact of laws on service delivery.

(P.O. 3, 4, 6, 9)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

A textbook is not required for this class. A variety of handouts and on-line references will be provided throughout the quarter. Students will be responsible for maintaining and organizing a three-ring binder containing the handouts and articles printed from the Internet, individual student assignments and agency summaries provided by other students. The binder will contain a bibliography, list of references and a contents page.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance. 20 pts (2/class)
2. Five written documentation papers, each written in on a different aspect of case recording or technical writing in a format used in a local social work setting. (Writing options and assignments provided and practiced in class). 100 points (20 points/assignment). See the assignment attachment for details.
3. Case Plan or Treatment Plan Assignment. Develop a written treatment plan using one of the formats discussed in class. A client scenario will be provided. Assess the information and list client strengths and needs. Based on the assessment, choose three issues to be addressed and develop the treatment plan based on the issues identified. Clearly outline goals, objectives, desired outcomes and time lines, as described in the format used in the assignment. The treatment plan must be between 3 and 5 pages long. 25 points.
4. Guest Speaker Reaction Paper. A speaker from a local social services agency will present information to the class regarding policy and procedures, laws and funding sources, and their impact on the writing required by the agency. The student then will write a two-page reaction paper that includes a description of the agency's purpose, documentation requirements and the social/political conditions that impact the documentation requirements. 25 points.
5. Resource Manual. Students will be responsible for maintaining and organizing a three-ring binder containing the handouts and articles printed off of the internet. The binder will be kept by the student to serve as a personal resource manual. It will also include a section for each of the written assignments completed by the student, one page summary of other student presentations as well as a bibliography, list of references and a contents page. 30 points.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Since a text is not required for this class, attendance is considered crucial for a thorough understanding of the subject. Ten points will be given for each class attendance and subtracted for each absence.

GRADING

Five written documentation papers	100 pts (20 pts/assignment)
Written treatment plan or case plan	25 pts
Attendance	20 pts (2/class)
Guest Speaker Reaction Paper	25 pts
Resource Manual	30 pts.

A total of 200 points is possible.

180-200 points = A
160-179 points = B
140-159 points = C
120-139 points = D
Under 119 points = F

Late assignments will lose 5 points for each class period they are late. Late assignments cannot be turned in after two weeks.

An Incomplete grade (“I”) for this course is NOT an option, except in cases of extreme emergency or death of a family member. In either situation, instructor approval is required. The instructor must be notified within 48 hours.

Grading criteria for writing assignments

Written assignments will be worth various points. The distribution of the points will be determined on the following percentages.

Content (Clear, coherent, convincing)	10 %
Organization (Follow assignment directions, information in logical order)	10 %
Readability (punctuation, spelling, grammar, follow writing tips)	10 %
Accurate reflection of information	15 %
Reference; correct use of APA format	5 %

WEEKLY OUTLINE

Week 1

Topics:

Introductions

Review of course expectations and syllabus

Assignments and due dates

Types of writing in social work settings

Connecting assessment, interviewing and documentation skills

Documentation defined

The importance of documentation to the client, social worker, and agency

Documentation in various agency settings

Interviewing and documentation

Practice:

Samples of documentation formats

Group exercise documenting a role play of client interview

Required Readings:

Handouts provided in class

Web sites listed in class

Assignments Due:

Begin a running list of documentation and technical writing dos and don'ts. Not to be turned in but to be used in case discussion each week.

Week 2

Topics:

Review assignment from previous week

The importance of documentation

Legal issues: protecting the client, social worker and agency

Clients records and confidentiality

Disclosure of information

Release of information forms

The impact of funding, client and agency on documentation

Types of funding in social services agencies

How funding impacts the work with clients

How law and policy impact work with clients

Practice:

Read samples of confidentiality laws

Small group review of client scenarios and application of general legal issues and confidentiality laws and policies

Large group discussion of legal issues

Group question and answers on funding

Required Readings:

Handouts provided in class

Web sites listed in class

Assignments:

Add legal considerations to the list of dos and don'ts begun last week. Keep the list with you for class discussion.

Week 3

Topics:

Review assignment from previous week
What goes into a good intake/assessment?
Listening for themes
Information gathering and documenting the service needs of the client
Types of assessments and methods of use in agency settings
Organizing information

Practice:

Small group practice
Choosing an intake and assessment format
Classmate interview based on client scenario provided by instructor
Take notes while interviewing the client

Required Reading:

Handouts provided in class
Web sights listed in class

Assignments:

Information gathered, by taking notes when interviewing the classmate, will be transferred to the chosen intake form and developed into an initial, one page assessment. The form and assessment are due one week from the date they are assigned.

Add to list of dos and don'ts and legal consideration in social work writing

Week 4

Topics:

Review assignment from previous week
Case notes and recording: various formats and forms
 SOAP
 Required by funding: elements and information
 Court ordered Treatment Plans: what must be documented
 Documenting for on-going assessment
 For service providers and contractors with Social Services Agencies
 On the record: what is subject to court order
 Writing brief and informative progress note
Release of information: Purpose and Time limitations
HIPPA: Basics of HIPPA in Social Services agency
Client's rights to review documentation

Practice:

Small group practice
Review intake form and assessment with classmate/client
 Discuss strengths and needs
 Recommend and negotiate services
 Explain purpose and use of release of information
Request that classmate/client sign release to communicate with service agencies

Required Reading:

Handouts provided in class
Web sights listed in class

Assignments:

Choose a documentation method from forms and formats presented. Write a one page of case documentation on your follow-up “client” interview. The assignment is due one week from the date it is assigned.

Add to list of dos and don'ts and legal consideration in social work writing

Week 5

Topics:

- Review assignment from previous week
- Types of services requiring referrals
- Referral Letter and Referral Packet (from various social services agencies)
 - Information required by service agency
 - Releasing other professionals reports
 - What disclosures does the release of information allow
 - Referral letter as a tool for obtaining services
 - Explaining referral process to clients

Practice:

- With class mate/client fill out referral forms
- List all supplemental documents to be gathered from client
- List all supplemental documents to be gathered from other professionals

Required Reading:

- Handouts provided in class
- Web sights listed in class

Assignments:

Write a cover letter to include with referral packet. It should be a brief summary of the client's needs, eligibility for services, and how the client can benefit from the services requested. The assignment is due one week from the date it is assigned.

Add to list of dos and don'ts and legal consideration in social work writing

Week 6

Topics:

- Review assignment from previous week
- Guest Speaker or Guest Speakers: Writing for the agency for law, policy and culture

Practice:

- Questions of Speaker

Required Reading:

- Handouts provided in class
- Web sights listed in class

Assignments:

Add to list of dos and don'ts and legal consideration in social work writing.

Week 7

Topics:

- Review assignment from previous week
- Report to the Court

Requirements in CPS
Requirements in Mental Health Commitment
Required by Youth Court

Agency forms and formats

Practice:

Use all of the information gathered to date regarding classmate/client
Discuss purpose of the Report to the Court to the Client
Discuss what you intend to include in the Report to the Court
Seek input from class mate/client about what to include in Report to the Court
Choose a form or format
Ask instructor for clarification if needed
Begin writing the report in class

Required Reading:

Handouts provided in class
Web sights listed in class

Assignments:

Write a report to the court based on the assessment and recommendations in the previous assignments. Cases must reflect the legal standards required by the nature and purpose of the report. The assignment is due one week from the date it is assigned.

Add to list of dos and don'ts and legal consideration in social work writing

Be prepared to present agency assessment, if scheduled for next week.

Week 8

Topics:

Review assignment from previous week
Case Summary: forms and formats from various agencies
 Defining summary
 Agency required components
 Legal requirements
 Confidentiality considerations
Begin class presentations

Practice:

If time permits after class presentation student and classmate will discuss the current status of the case and determine if the summary will be a progress summary or closure

Required Reading:

Handouts provided in class
Websites listed in class

Assignments:

Write a case summary of either client progress or case closure. Based on previous assignments and on-going classmate interviews, the summary will reflect progress and/or problems with the Case Plan/Treatment plan. The case summary will address specific issues, make recommendations for further services and/or recommendations to close the client case. Limit summary to two pages.

Add to list of dos and don'ts and legal consideration in social work writing.

Week 9

Topics:

Review assignment from previous week
Treatment Planning in different agency settings: forms and formats
 Getting the client to own the goals plan
 Goal
 Objectives
 Action Steps/Tasks
 Who's responsible for tasks
 Time lines
 Measurement of goals and objectives
Continue class presentations

Practice:

Talk with classmate/client about strengths and needs identified, to date
Ask client about personal goals
Suggest goals that address client's needs
If applicable discuss legal requirements to include specific tasks
Outline the various components of the treatment plan, with the client

Required Reading:

Handouts provided in class
Websites listed in class

Assignments:

Develop a written treatment plan, using one of the formats discussed in class. Assess the information gathered previously and through discussions with classmate/client. Identify, and list, client strengths and needs. Choose three issues (one the client's, one the social worker's, one legally required) to be addressed and develop the treatment plan based on the issues identified. Clearly outline goals, objectives, desired outcomes and time lines, as described in the format used in the assignment. The treatment plan must be at least three and no more than 5 pages.

Add to list of dos and don'ts and legal consideration in social work writing.

Week 10

Topics:

Review assignment from previous week
Continue class presentations
To do and not to do: Writing for social services agencies
Organizing the client record
Final Questions and Answers

Practice:

Review Individual Binders as a class
Explore sample files from various agencies
Add list of dos and don't and legal consideration to Individual Binders

Required Reading:

Nothing required, although some last handouts may be provided

Assignments:

Any remaining assignments and re-writes

REFERENCES

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th Ed.).

Corey, G., Corey, M. S., Callanan, P. (1993). *Issues and ethics in the helping professions*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Kirst-Ashman & Hull, (2006). *Understanding Generalist Practice* (4th edition). CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Piazza, N. & Baruth, N. (1990). Client Record Recording. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 68, 313-316.

Sheafor, B. W., & Horejsi, C. R., & Horesji, G. A., (2001) *Techniques and guidelines for social work practice*, Sixth Edition. Needham Heights, MA.: Allyn Bacon.

Summers, N. (2001). *Fundamentals of Case Management Practice*. Wadsworth.

Lukas, S. (1993). *Where to start and what to ask: An assessment handbook*. New York: Norton.

SKC Syllabus Supplement

Academic Honor Code

All course work shall follow the guidelines of the Academic Honor Code as set forth by the SKC Student Handbook. Do your own work; allow other students to do their own work. **Plagiarism** involves the taking of someone else's words, ideas, or writings and presenting them as your own. Avoid plagiarism, and always acknowledge the ideas of others and cite your sources of information. Violation of the Academic Honor Code may result in failure of the assignment, the course, or possible expulsion from school.

Reasonable Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations are provided to students with diagnosed or suspected disabilities through the ACCESS Office located in the Social Work Department in the Beaverhead Building. For additional information, contact John Domitrovich, the SKC ACCESS Officer, Beaverhead Building Room 131; 406-275-4889; john_domitrovich@skc.edu.

Appropriate Behavior

As an enrolled student of Salish Kootenai College, you are expected to display professionalism and responsibility in attitude and behavior. Treat yourself and others with courtesy and respect.

Course Transferability

Transferability of any SKC course to any other academic institution is entirely dependent upon the program requirements of that other institution.

Course Responsibilities

Knowledge of the course content, class lectures, assignments, and syllabus content are the responsibility of the student regardless of absenteeism. Syllabus content and calendars are tentative; instructors will notify you of any changes.

Study Time Expectation

Students are expected to spend one (1) hour in class and a minimum of two (2) hours outside the class per week per every credit hour. For example, if this is a 5-credit course, you are expected to spend 5 hours in class and a minimum of 10 hours outside of class, a total of at least 15 hours each week to earn a C.

Attendance

Good attendance and active participation will help you to achieve success in your academic career. Poor attendance will result in missed information, missed assignments and tests, and possible failure of the course.

Guidelines for Papers

A Paper: Generally has strong presentation, with a solid opening paragraph explaining what the paper is about. The argument is clear, logical and backed up by evidence, (assessment, intake, etc.) Examples support your paper. The paper demonstrates a sound command of all material from the course, reading, discussions, guest speakers, etc. “A” papers are well written with few, if any, errors of fact or grammar.

B Paper: Has a presentation, but is less developed. The body uses examples and demonstrates an understanding of the material, but lacks depth or sophistication. There may be errors of fact. Contains more errors of fact or grammar/spelling/punctuation than an “A” paper.

C Paper: Weak or only implied understanding of the topic. Paper demonstrates some evidence of familiarity with the course materials, but in a superficial way. Writing lacks structure often does not use paragraphs, and examples and details are few or missing. Several errors of fact and grammar/spelling/punctuation. Paper is too brief, is not supported by facts. Assignment directions may be only partially followed.

D Paper: Show little evidence of grasping the issue. May make some connections, but in a disjointed way. Rarely offers detailed information. Like C papers, these are usually too brief. Errors of fact are common and errors of grammar/spelling/punctuation. Directions are not followed accurately.

F Papers: Papers are poorly organized and poorly written, do not follow directions, and show very little or no grasp of the subject matter. These are often too brief and may be full of spelling and punctuation errors.

Some Writing Pointers:

1. Type using Times New Roman 12 point font.
2. Write assignments in Word format so you can do a spell and grammar check.
3. Avoid use of ampersand and most abbreviations.
4. When writing about a series of more than two items, put a comma before the word “and”:
e.g., “Sam, Joe, and Gina formed one of the groups.”
5. When writing quotations, place commas and periods inside the quotation marks (e.g., “After giving your presentation on ‘Group Theories,’ write a one-page paper about what that experience was like.” (Note: The British put the comma or period after the quotation marks, but the U.S. puts them inside.) Make sure all quotations have the appropriate reference to their author.
6. Always follow APA format.
7. Because this is a writing course you may submit your papers for review and if you want to improve your grade on a specific paper you may make corrections and resubmit it.
8. Other writing tips will be provided through handouts.

Documentation assignments

To receive full points, follow the directions carefully.

1. Intake form and Initial Assessment: You will complete an intake and client form using information obtained from an interview of a class mate based on a case scenario. Various intake forms and assessment formats will be distributed in class. Information will be gathered, by taking notes when interviewing the classmate, and transferred to the chosen intake form and developed into an initial assessment, as homework. The form and assessment are due one week from the date they are assigned.
2. Case notes are to be written in one of the various formats provided in class and used in local social work setting. Instructions for the recording formats will be discussed and practiced in class. Students will continue to work with a classmate and follow through with the case scenario. Case recording assignment will be due the week after it has been discussed in class.
3. Referral letter and referral packet to a specific agency: Based on classmate interview, intake, assessment and on-going interviewing the student will write a letter to a service provision agency and fill out and referral forms required by the agency to consider providing services to the client. The letter will serve as a brief overview and summary of the request for services and be included with the referral packet.
4. Written report to court: The student will write a report to court based on the assessment and recommendations in the previous assignments. Cases must reflect the legal standards required by the nature and purpose of the report. The assignment is due one week from the date it is assigned.
5. Case Summaries: The student will write a case summary of either progress or closure. Based on previous assignments and on-going classmate interviews, the summary will reflect progress and problems with the Case Plan/Treatment plan. The case summary will address the specific issues and make recommendations for further services.