

INTRODUCTION

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WHY A GUIDE TO SOCIAL work writing? Every profession has its unique characteristics, but common to all is a focus on clear, unambiguous prose. Because social work is both an academic discipline and a profession, we have set out to acknowledge and examine writing issues important to both. Also, because contemporary social work practice is increasingly evidence-based, collaboration between practitioners and researchers is ever more welcomed and called for in professional publications. This guide will help social workers write with a keen awareness of the probable expectations of their reader—professor, supervisor, employer, journal article reviewer, grant proposal reviewer, and/or scholarship or admissions reader, to name a few.

The guide presents a collection of essays that highlight writing issues important to social work students (from BSW to PhD), practitioners in the field, scholars, and educators. We've tried to emphasize the issues that will contribute to professionalism in one's writing, whether it be academic and scholarly writing or writing in fieldwork, clinical practice, administration, advocacy, evidence-based practice, or grant and program proposal application. Predominant throughout is a focus on process, that is, on thinking about and approaching one's subject in a manner that will lead to writing that is clear, purposeful, and comprehensive. Case vignettes, descriptions of best practices, and models of good writing, as well as excerpts and author commentary, are presented.

PART I: THE FOUNDATIONS OF GOOD WRITING

Social work practice and writing have been intertwined since the profession began. In the book's first section, chapter 1 explores the history of writing in

social work, and then, in the next three chapters, the authors focus on the conceptualization, development, and presentation of key aspects of social work writing, publication, and research.

CHAPTER 1: WRITING IN SOCIAL WORK IN THE UNITED STATES: 1880S TO THE PRESENT

Barbara Levy Simon documents the elasticity and variability that have characterized social work writing, a flexibility that has grown out of the profession's involvement with a multiplicity of methods, activities, clients, contexts of practice, organizational bases, and funding sources since the 1880s. Her chapter tracks the writing that has prevailed over time in the three active realms of social work: daily practice, advocacy, and research and scholarship.

CHAPTER 2: WRITING STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC PAPERS

Warren Green discusses the connections between thinking and writing in this chapter on academic writing issues. He posits that free writing, rather than outlining, enhances the entire writing process, from idea to finished paper. He first offers an approach to reading, summarizing, and critiquing journal articles that can quickly and efficiently lead to a sound first-draft paper. He then goes on to discuss the organization of a paper, the editing stage, and APA style. He concludes with tips for international students who may be unfamiliar with the kind of academic writing that is practiced in the United States.

CHAPTER 3: WRITING FOR PUBLICATION IN SOCIAL WORK JOURNALS

Ronald Feldman presents a how-to approach to writing an article for a social work journal—from the initial idea to brainstorming and conducting research through to the writing and publication stages. He gets into the nitty-gritty of writing for publication, right down to the need for a quiet space and regularly scheduled times to write. He organizes the chapter into three phases—pre-writing, writing, and post-writing, carefully and thoroughly delineating each phase along with the distinct issues for work in each.

CHAPTER 4: INSCRIBING KNOWLEDGE: WRITING RESEARCH IN SOCIAL WORK

Denise Burnette reviews the fact-finding, analytic, and argumentative approaches to research. She presents Stephen Toulman’s model of structural argumentation as a starting point for shaping a research project. She expands on Toulman’s six elements of a strong argument—claim, grounds, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal—and illustrates their use in a hypothetical study on kinship foster care. She addresses the social science debate over quantitative versus qualitative research, the mixed method approach, and how one’s views are affected by one’s approach to research. She concludes with a look to research that is increasingly interdisciplinary.

PART II: APPLIED PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Social work is commonly recognized as a profession of numerous methods that serve various populations. Reflecting the field’s heterogeneity, Part II probes writing as a necessary element in the profession’s practice. Writing as a component of everyday social work is pivotal for students who are entering fieldwork education; therefore, chapter 5 concentrates on student writing in field internships. The following chapters guide readers through writing in five major types of social work that many practitioners consider core forms of the profession: clinical social work, policy practice, program and proposal development, social work advocacy, and social enterprise administration.

CHAPTER 5: STUDENT WRITING IN FIELD EDUCATION

Kathryn Conroy notes two types of writing that predominate in fieldwork education: writing for the purpose of documenting interns’ work for agency leadership and reflective writing that is designed to expand students’ self-awareness, cultural sensitivities, and practice skills. She discusses chart notes, progress notes, and other forms of agency recordings that undergraduate and graduate students are responsible for keeping up to date. Then she provides an overview of process recordings and fieldwork logs that are favorite educational tools employed by field supervisors and schools of social work. Finally, she reflects on key questions about field education writing that she encour-

ages all social work interns to raise with their field education supervisors and advisors early in their internships.

CHAPTER 6: WRITING FOR AND ABOUT CLINICAL PRACTICE

Mary Sormanti offers guidance on clinical writing. She explains the importance of case notes and how practitioners must be sensitive to the parameters of what to include and what not to include when writing case notes. She discusses clinical writing for treatment plans and for publication, detailing what is called for in each. She poses the question, “Why do clinical social workers write?” and goes on to explore what clinical practitioners can learn about their work and themselves through writing. She then discusses how social work values and ethics influence one’s work, offering excerpts from case notes to show how a strengths-based writing approach can positively influence the therapeutic relationship and therefore the client’s outcome. She concludes with principles to keep in mind when writing for clinical purposes.

CHAPTER 7: GETTING THE POLICY MESSAGE ACROSS TO DIVERSE AUDIENCES

Shirley Gatenio-Gabel and Sheila Kamerman first define and mark out the roles that both policy analysts and advocates play, showing how their individual roles are critical in effecting social change. They then outline a best approach to writing for policy analysis and advocacy. Leading the reader through a five-step process in analyzing and writing about a policy issue, they show how those five steps can be applied to a variety of policy papers, including reports, briefs, and memos, explaining how structure and purpose differ in each. They conclude with a section on the “dos and don’ts” of effective policy writing.

CHAPTER 8: WRITING IN PROGRAM AND PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT: THE SOCIAL WORK WRITER AS TRANSLATOR

Marion Riedel illustrates how to best initiate, develop, and write a program proposal by using a personal account of her visit to post-Katrina New Orleans with a group of graduate social work students to develop a proposal for a program that was ultimately funded successfully. Starting with an assessment of the needs of a community along with the inclusion of its members

in the development of the proposal, she offers a step-by-step guide on how to move forward with a proposal—from examples of a cover page and an executive summary, through a narrative that presents purpose, background, and the resources needed. She ends with sound advice on how best to implement a successful proposal.

CHAPTER 9: ADVOCACY

Vicki Lens first suggests that success in advocacy calls for appreciating how mainstream society articulates a problem. She then introduces “frames,” which are the viewpoints and values from which people think and talk about a problem, and she focuses on the two main frames—liberal and conservative. She discusses the language used to present one’s frame, indicating how the terms used to define and denote a problem serve to speak to adherents to that frame and sway others to become adherents to it. She emphasizes the importance of narrative in communicating a position on a problem, using both qualitative and quantitative data to do so. Finally, she notes the importance of choice of writing style to context and audience, whether for a policy brief, an op-ed piece, or a presentation for legislative testimony.

CHAPTER 10: ADMINISTRATIVE WRITING

Sue Matorin notes that with the increasing use of evidence-based methods to enhance efficiency and with face-to-face meetings continuing to give way to written communication, particularly e-mail, writing has become more important than ever before at the program management level of social work administration. After reviewing some basic principles of sound writing, she offers examples and explanations of both poor and exemplary administrative writing, drawn from memos, policy and procedure manuals, mission statements, employee evaluations, minutes, and executive summaries.

PART III: WRITING IN DISTINCT FIELDS OF PRACTICE

Whereas Part II presents core kinds of practice writing that most social workers perform at some points in their career, Part III offers chapters on writing for five discrete fields of practice, designed for specialists who work with particular populations. Each of these five chapters shows a depth of understanding for its respective domain of practice and its writing demands.

CHAPTER 11: WRITING IN FAMILY AND CHILD WELFARE

Brenda McGowan and Elaine Walsh examine recording requirements, mandated by federal and state laws and regulations, that affect professionals involved in protective and foster care services for children and adolescents. They detail the writing choices available to social workers who take part in developmental and preventive services for families and children who are at risk of abuse or neglect. The authors next provide a useful overview of the central components of written intake reports, case assessments and service plans, referral letters, closing summaries, and advocates' public communications. The marked impact of computerization on writing in child and family welfare is also analyzed.

CHAPTER 12: WRITING STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

Alida Bouris and Vincent Guilamo-Ramos survey the multiple forms of writing regularly done by school-based and school-linked social workers, breaking down the field of practice into four essential parts: (1) consulting on interdisciplinary school-based teams; (2) providing direct services to children, adolescents, and their families in one-on-one, group, or family modalities; (3) pursuing program development initiatives; and (4) conducting assessments. In relation to these four core activities of school-based social workers, the authors discuss letters of introduction to parents and primary caregivers of students, as well as writing called for in workshop designs or curricula for school-based programs organized as efforts to help with the prevention among young children and adolescents of substance abuse, bullying, child abuse or neglect, sexual abuse and sexual delinquency, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Special attention is paid to written communications to and guides for parents and caregivers in prevention efforts.

CHAPTER 13: WRITING ABOUT CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ISSUES: LESSONS LEARNED FROM WORKING WITH STREET-BASED SEX WORKERS

Susan Witte excavates social work writing in the world of practice that addresses individuals and groups who historically live on the social margins—people affected by homelessness, substance abuse, violence, and HIV and

sexually transmitted diseases. In particular, she reports on writing that accompanies work with street-based sex workers. She narrates and analyzes her professional journey as a producer of summary reports, conference presentations, grant applications, and publications about adolescents and adults who make their living in high-risk sexual commerce. Her chapter models her assumption that professional writing is a lifelong process of evolution and improvement, and she provides rich evidence of her steady self-inspection as someone who, like all other human beings, internalizes and inadvertently expresses social biases.

CHAPTER 14: WRITING IN THE FIELD OF AGING

Ann Burack-Weiss's chapter achieves its goal of revealing the uniqueness of the lives of older clients despite the standardization imposed by computerized forms. She pays close attention to the possibilities inherent in the one-paragraph or one-page narratives that are appended to computerized case records in the contemporary field of geriatric social services. Reflecting on her own practice in the recent past with a selection of four older adults and their families, she explores the craft of telling the stories of older individuals through writing intakes and dispositions, referrals, chart notes, and psychosocial assessments.

CHAPTER 15: WRITING IN INTERNATIONAL WORK: POWER, KNOWLEDGE, AND SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD

Fred Ssewamala and Elizabeth Sperber address the delicacy of intercultural translation in their chapter on writing in international social work in a world still characterized by profound economic, political, and technological disparities. They identify important tenets to take into account when writing about concepts and data across national, continental, and cultural boundaries. The ethical and political pitfalls that are frequently encountered by social development workers in an international context are documented. The authors highlight writing about capacity-building and human agency. They also concentrate on the cultural distance between local understandings of conditions and events and social scientists' conceptions of correlation and causality. The danger associated with writing that implies or expresses value judgments is another of their major themes.

