

Occupational Therapy Writing Tips

In the course of your occupational therapy education at the University of North Dakota, you will be asked to complete a variety of writing assignments. Students often have questions about the differences between the types of writing they are asked to do. This document is designed to answer some of the most common questions and provide guidance for you as you write. Four types of writing will be addressed: journal or reflective writing, developing fact sheets or handouts, technical writing specific to the profession, and scholarly writing of research papers (i.e., professional summaries, research papers, etc.).

Journal or Reflective Writing

The process of reflection is something you probably do everyday without thinking about it or its implications. You likely stop to think back over an event to consider what it has meant to you and its relative importance in connection with your experience. Often people use this style of thinking in personal diaries or journals, or to write as a way to work through a crisis. Viewed as such, reflection and reflective writing is a way to become more aware of personal insights and self-understandings.

In academia, reflective writing exercises are commonly used to facilitate the student's learning from educational or practical experiences. Writing about your experiences can help you develop and become more aware of the connections between what you already know and what you are learning. You become a more active and aware learner in the process. Examples of reflective writing in occupational therapy education include journal writing and reflection papers.

Reflective writing assignments are designed to facilitate personal reflection and, as such, are typically written in the first person. "I" statements are expected as the student takes ownership of his/her thoughts and personal understandings. Although organization is clearly a useful element, it is also understood that individuals often reflect in less organized ways before coming to useful conclusions. Language used in reflecting writing is often more casual than in the other forms of writing addressed in this document; nevertheless, attention to grammar and punctuation are important contributors to clarity in your writing. Unless you are reflecting on specific readings, which need to be identified in your writing, in-text references and a reference page are not usually required.

Fact Sheets & Handouts

Fact sheets and/or handouts are often written to support a presentation. Both are designed to make it easier for the reader/audience to participate in the presentation. You may be asked to write a fact sheet or provide a handout as an assignment or as a supplement for a presentation in a class. In either case, fact sheets and handouts are typically one page in length. If you go over one page, be sure your information is well-organized to ensure that it is actually read by the audience member.

When writing a fact sheet or handout, keep the writing brief, concise and to-the-point. Use at least a 12-point font, 1-inch margins and present related information in groups or 'chunks' using headings and bullets to separate content. Writing is in third person; verb tense is usually present tense since the information is usually assumed to be

current, if not recent. Be sure to provide references for your information; include citations in text and complete references, if appropriate.

Technical Writing in the Profession

Technical writing in the profession refers to the writing of reports of varying sizes and purposes to communicate the occupational therapist's actions or perspective. Whenever you are using your professional skills as an occupational therapist, you can expect to be documenting what you are doing as part of the clinical documentation required in the practice setting. In each case, to convey the message that occupational therapy is a highly skilled profession and your services are important to the client and the facility, your writing needs to demonstrate a high degree of professionalism.

Commonly referred to as documentation, occupational therapists are engaged in technical writing activities on a daily basis. Examples of the varying purposes include recording the order of interventions provided, demonstrating therapist expertise, sharing information with a healthcare team, writing to establish effectiveness of occupational therapy for third-party payers, and writing in the medical record as part of a legal document. Occupational therapists also write program descriptions for marketing purposes, business plans for growth and development, and grant applications to seek additional funding for patient programs. (Notably, grant applications also have an element of scholarly writing.) As stated above, it will be important that your writing demonstrates your professionalism.

The formats for technical writing in occupational therapy vary widely from one institution/facility to another. As you move through the UND occupational therapy program, you can expect to be exposed to a variety of formats for assessment summaries, treatment plans, progress notes, and discharge summaries. Generally speaking, the writing is in third person and written to be as concise, yet informative, as possible. Use of abbreviations varies, as well; students will want to check the institution/facility's list of approved abbreviations before writing. For example, in the case of community-based providers, few abbreviations are used in writing to ensure that both medical and non-medical staff are able to communicate effectively.

Scholarly Writing (Research Papers)

Scholarly writing is a more formal and precise type of writing. The rules and conventions are distinctly different than those used for reflective writing, fact sheets, handouts, or technical writing in the profession. Most scholarly writing is done with the goal of sharing scholarly information with peer colleagues or to demonstrate scholarly expertise necessary for academic graduation (such as your scholarly project).

The first step toward scholarly writing in occupational therapy is to purchase the most recent copy of the *APA Publication Manual*. The manual is considered the 'style manual' for scholarly writing in occupational therapy (and most health sciences). The rules and conventions are explicitly described in the manual, as are tips for organization and presentation of your scholarly writing. Useful information regarding ways to express your ideas effectively and reduce bias in language in your writing are provided as well. Taking the time to become familiar with the organization of the manual will definitely be time well-spent.

In addition to basic formatting of the page(s), you will want to refresh your knowledge regarding the use of punctuation, spelling, capitalization, italics, abbreviations, quotations, numbers, tables and figures, appendices, use of references in text and presentation of references.

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