



Principles for keeping good file notes

- File notes should be:
 - Specific
 - Factual
 - Accurate
 - Legible
 - Written in English
- File notes should be **honest, specific** and record **observable** details relevant to the service you are providing
- The notes should be **factual**, avoid **unsupported** statements of opinion and use **direct** speech
 - Ensure you include the observable details that led you to form the opinion
 - When quoting, either use quotation marks of direct speech, or paraphrase what the client has said

Tips for recording file notes

Do:

- Include the date and time
- Clearly identify the client (especially with similar first and last names)
- Clearly identify yourself as the author, give your designated position and sign the file note (even if it's with your initials) or ensure a computerised identification system to avoid others tampering with your notes
- Correct and initial any errors (put a straight line through mistakes and initial it)
- Set out sequential reports
- Use only approved symbols and abbreviations

Don't:

- Do not include opinions without including the information or observations that led you to hold that opinion:
 - Avoid unsubstantiated opinions: "the client was distressed"/ "Rosemary was drunk"
 - Rather, describe what you observed that led you to that opinion: "the client was crying" / "Rosemary smelt of alcohol and was swaying from side to side"
- Do not include diagnoses you are not qualified to make

Note: Some professions and services may require more or less from your file notes. This is a general guide only

File keeping policy

- It is important to know your workplace file keeping policy to protect your file notes and avoid any breaches of confidentiality

At your workplace, consider:

- Does your workplace have a policy?
- Do you know where to find it?
- Do you know what it says and what you are supposed to do?

Outside of the workplace, consider:

- What is protecting your notes if you are not at work?
 - Make sure your workplace policy is clear on authorised person(s) in your workplace that may deal with requests in your absence
- What is protecting your notes or correspondence about a client to another professional? (Eg to a psychologist, government department etc)
 - **For documents/letters:** You can place a "confidential" stamp on documents, or contain precedent paragraphs in relation to confidentiality
 - **For emails:** You can place a disclaimer in relation to confidentiality



Web addresses:

- Australian Association of Social Workers: case notes resources
 - <http://www.aasw.asn.au/publications/forms-resources>
- Australian Psychological Society
 - <http://www.psychology.org.au/>
- NSW Health Record Keeping Policy
 - http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/PD/2005/PD2005_127.html

Referrals:

- If your notes are subpoenaed, contact:
 - In-house legal services
 - Women's Legal Services NSW (in relation to female clients) or your local Community Legal Centre
 - Law Access NSW
 - Private lawyer
- In criminal cases where your client may be a sexual assault victim, contact the **Sexual Assault Communications Privilege Legal Service** within Legal Aid NSW:
 - <http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/civil-law/sexual-assault-communications-privilege-service>