
Is there a better way to write reports in schools?

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Resources

This presentation has taken this work and extended the ideas of the following:

- Hass, M.R. and Carriere, J.A. (2014). Writing useful, accessible, and legally defensible psychoeducational reports. Wiley & Sons, Inc: New Jersey.
- Lichtenstein, R. (2013). Writing psychoeducational reports that matter: A consumer-responsive approach. *Communiqué*, 42(3), 1, 28–30.
- Lichtenstein, R. (2013b). Writing psychoeducational reports that matter: A consumer-responsive approach, Part 2. *Communiqué*, 42(4), 1, 10–13.
- Lichtenstein, R. (2013c). Writing psychoeducational reports that matter: A consumer-responsive approach, Part 3. *Communiqué*, 42 (6), 1,
- PODCOST- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPBpFnHSrJA>
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2010). Principles for professional ethics. Bethesda, MD: Author: Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org/standards/2010standards/1_%20Ethical%20Principles.pdf

Outcomes

- Understand the current state of report writing in our profession.
- Think about shifting your practice for better impact by increasing readability by writing shorter, more concise reports using far less boilerplate



Issues with the Written Report

The Written Report

- School psychologists continue to spend more time in mandated special education assessments than any other professional activity.
- The written report serves as a basis for multidisciplinary team’s decision regarding eligibility.
- Writing reports impacts all special educators roles.



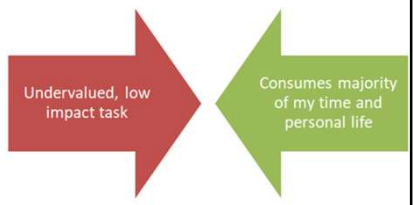
The Written Report

Lichtenstein (2013) Major purpose of the evaluation:

- To provide an accurate and in-depth description of the child's functioning, capabilities, needs, and situational challenges.
- To provide diagnostic conclusions that focus intervention efforts and determine the range of available options (e.g., special education eligibility); and, most important,
- To provide insights and recommendations that improve the functioning and well-being of the child.

The Problem

- Writing reports can be a time intensive task yet many question if the report is read and understood by parents or educators
- Many reports are lengthy, require a high readability level and often lack clear understanding of the outcome.
- Report writing can be viewed as perfunctory and undervalued



What is the problem with how we are currently writing reports?

- Clinical nature of the experience might sometimes is impersonal about the student
- Confusion about what is expected in a report by the parent
- Far to lengthy , filled with tables and technical jargon, to be easily consumable
- Too much time on exhaustive results and little link to the plan or implications.
- Lengthy reports provided to parents before the meeting with little time for them to digest the materials.
- Test results continue to be emphasized and interviews, observations, records and responses to instruction are devalued in traditional report writing frameworks.

Are we really meeting the purpose of the evaluation with approaching the written report this way?

Challenges for School Psychologists

- There seems to be an **unclear purpose** for the report
- There is confusion about the **audience**.
- Questionable impact of the report on educational outcomes
 - Who is reading these report. Seriously. Who reads every word?
 - Who is learning something about the student/child that is actionable
- The **format** is fragmented and prohibits understanding
- The sheer **length** prohibits understanding.
- Lengthy, time consuming reports **prevents engagement** in other direct intervention service activities that most SPs crave.
- The **report writing conundrum** (writing reports is required but you are not working with students when you are writing reports)

Strategies used to improve report writing in schools

Traditional strategies to improve report writing:

- Moving to computer generated reports
- Creating common boilerplate templates
- Using group reports formats to integrate data
- Use common drives (google) for simultaneously working on reports
- Target assessments to avoid duplication and really problem solve
- Divide and conquer - decide who needs to give what.
- Give less assessments in order to not write about it
- Use more classroom data and less individual new testing data

With the exception of group reports, these strategies do not tend to increase the quality or impact of the reports.

Connection Partner Share

How has your report writing changed over the course of your career?

Be ready to share

How did we get here?

- University training programs provide feedback as you hone your skills and students are trying to impress their professors. The practical nature of the report may be lost with conflicting agendas.
- Fear of advocates - more is commonly viewed as better
- Unclear, unstated, or unaddressed diagnostic questions leave the reader confused
- High student to school psychologist ratios triggering a testing machine where templates are preferred
- Reports that concentrate on exhaustive written descriptions and little on interpreting the information using our expertise.

Report Formats

1. Test by Test Driven report (WISC-V, WIAT, CELF) with tables embedded
2. Domain Driven or themes (Reading, social-emotional, Mathematics) with tables embedded
3. Problem-Solving Model
4. Referral-based, question-driven model

Most common report format. Requires the reader to organize and synthesize related material as they read. Who is doing the interpretation- the reader or the professional?

Issue #1: Readability

“The average psycho-educational evaluation is written at or above the 16th grade level so it isn’t surprising that you were confused. The people who need to understand the findings of your child’s evaluation – you and your child’s teachers – say psychological reports are not helpful.”

<https://www.wrightslaw.com/blog/attention-parents-we-need-your-help/>

Apply readability to the current knowledge about reading habits of the millions of people on the internet.



What do parents say about your reports?

An example from a parent in the field...What can we learn>

Issue #2: Reading Stamina

We live in a digital media world who lacks the engagement for long reports.



Report Length Can be a Barrier

- “Creativity loves constraints and simplicity is at our core. Tweets are limited to 140 characters so they can be consumed easily anywhere, even via mobile text messages. There’s no magical length for a Tweet, but a recent report by Buddy Media revealed that **Tweets shorter than 100 characters get a 17% higher engagement rate.**”
- But **40 is the magic number** that Jeff Bullas found was most effective in his study of retail brands on Facebook. He measured engagement of posts, defined by “like” rate and comment rate, and the ultra-short **40-character posts received 86 percent higher engagement** than others.

Issue #3: More Meaningful Reports



It is all about time....

Report writing is time consuming.

How can we make the time we spent doing it matter the most for the consumers of our reports.

What is getting in our way of more concise, meaningful reports?

- Seeking permission to do business differently
- Some parents and advocates are expecting these reports .
- We have always done it this way.
- We need to justify all of our conclusions
- There is a feeling that when not using standardized testing, you need more exhaustive observational data/narrative
- Risk assessment - fear of attorney /Advocate - worst case scenario.
- Lost our professional goals and purpose

Activity #1 TAPS example

TAPS example - p55-

- Are these data interpreted in a way that consumers can understand?
- Are there data from multiple sources?
- Will this information help the IEP team write goals and accommodations?
- What is the readability? Is there jargon or technical terminology?

Activity Share out

- More positively written
- Integrated multiple sources of data.
- Issues of conflicting data are resolved along the way
- Each person read every word.

What is actually required in a written report?

Report Writing

- IDEA and MARSE
- National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

IDEA and MARSE

While all of this is helpful in shaping an eligibility evaluation, both IDEA and MARSE leave the tools, methodologies and strategies involved to the discretion of the evaluator. Neither State Rules or Federal Regs explicitly requires tools, methodologies and strategies by name. The requirement is that the results be valid and reliable.

NASP's Ethical Standards

Standard II.3.8 School psychologists adequately interpret findings and present results in **clear, understandable terms** so that the recipient can make informed choices.

Failing to write reports is actually not upholding your obligations outlined in our ethical standards.

We must outline

- Things that **must actually be included** in your written report
- Things that **must be true about your assessment**

Hass, et al.

What must be included

The local educational agency must provide a copy of the evaluation report and the documentation of determination of eligibility to the parent. 300.306(a)(2)

What must be included

(1) Each student suspected of having a disability shall be evaluated by a multidisciplinary evaluation team as defined in R 340.1701b(b). In addition to the requirements in R 340.1705 to R 340.1717, the multidisciplinary evaluation team shall do all of the following:

- (a) Complete a full and individual evaluation.
- (b) Make a recommendation of eligibility and **prepare a written report** to be presented to the individualized education program team by the designated multidisciplinary evaluation team member who can explain the instructional implication of evaluation results. The report shall include information needed by the individualized education program team to determine all of the following:
 - (i) Eligibility.
 - (ii) A student's present level of academic achievement and functional performance.
 - (iii) The educational needs of the student.

What must be true about the evaluation

Evaluation Procedures (300.304) according to IDEA should...

- use a variety of evaluation tools or approaches that gather functional and relevant data (RIOT by ICEL)
- be fair
- use valid and reliable tools and procedures
- be completed by a competent evaluator

Ideas to Consider to Shift Practice

The Mental Shift towards Meaningfulness

Current State

Parent and teachers “do the integrating” of the testing data and implications

New Vision

We do the integrating and organize the report

Create a report that you want to read every word.

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Do you agree with the purpose of a report?

- **Address** the concerns & questions of parents and teachers
- Accurately **document, integrate and synthesize** data from a **comprehensive** evaluation
- **Educate** team members and future readers
- **Form the foundation** for the IEP teams decisions about unique needs and special education eligibility
- **Document** compliance with ethical and legal mandates
 - Whether the child is a child with a disability; and the educational needs of the child. 300.301(c)(2)(i)-(ii)

Hass 2014

What will this process uncover?

- Evaluations solely based on standardized measures may struggle with this format especially with present level of performance in academic, behavior, developmental or functional skills.
- Requires integration of information- this is a skill that must be developed in many SPs.
- Moves the conversation towards what are we going to do instead of eligibility where we are most comfortable.
- Abandon the notion that you must include everything, instead focus on meaningfulness.

How might this be different in approach?

- Integration data together from interviews, observations and testing instead of reporting separately.

How might this be different in approach?

- Use simpler language and reduce jargon
- Include what is important

Test results - What is really necessary

Think about much explanation of the multitude of test scores in a evaluations. "There are relatively few findings of such importance that they are featured in the Conclusions or Summary section" yet the amount of time it takes to explain that is enormous.

Shift to talking about the important results.

Test results - What is really necessary

- Put tables in the technical appendix with a brief introduction to the assessments but don't spend time reporting the results separate.
- This serves as the technical evidence that you are data-driven and enable independent confirmation of interpretations. "The discerning professional can still pore over the numbers" (Lichtenstein, 2013)

What questions are important to frame a report?

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Reason for Referral

- Recent history or context for the case
- Describe what areas of disability are going to be assessed to meet our legal obligation to assess all areas of suspected disability and need.

What questions are important to frame a report

The purpose of any special education evaluation is to determine if the student is eligible as a student with a disability who is entitled to an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). IDEA requires that this evaluation answer the following questions:

1. Does the student have a disability?
2. Does the disability limit access to or progress in general curriculum?
3. Is the disability and its limitations severe enough to require specialized instruction so that the student can access or progress in the general curriculum?

This multidisciplinary evaluation explored each of these questions because an answer of 'Yes' to all three questions indicates that special education eligibility is appropriate and a plan for specialized instruction (IEP) is warranted. ("3 Question Litmus Test")

In order to answer the three IDEA eligibility questions, what information is needed?

This is your framing of the case or case conceptualization.

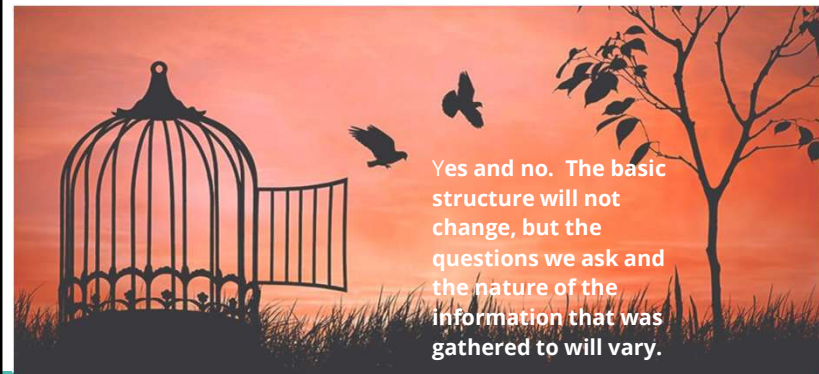
- What is the present level of academic and behavioral functioning in the areas assessed?
- What supports or services are needed and recommended for the IEP team to consider?

These questions provide evidence that the foundation of the IEP was appropriate and should be included. If the student is eligible, these questions should directly link to the PLAAF and goals and objectives at the IEP.

What questions are important based on the student?

- How does Anthony's developmental, health and educational history affect his academic achievement?
- What is Michael's current levels of academic, cognitive, and social emotional development?
- What is Kris's academic development?
- What is Kris's cognitive development?
- How well developed are Mike's adaptive Skills? For example, how independent is he at home and in the community?
- What changes, if any, are needed in Mike's Transition Plan for him to achieve his post-secondary goals?
- How do Max's cognitive processing strengths or weaknesses impact his academic skills?
- How do Max's behavior and social-emotional strengths and challenges affect his academic achievement?
- What are April's current academic skills in the areas of reading, written language

Do referral-based reports vary, depending on the characteristics of the child?



Activity #2: Review a Sample Report

Next steps

What barriers might prohibit you from moving to this type of report style?

Be prepared to discuss as a table.