

Ten Most Frequent Faults in Forensic Report Writing

Table 1. Ten most frequent faults in forensic report writing and the percentage of reports in which they were identified.

1. Opinions without sufficient explanations (56%)

Major interpretations or opinions were stated without sufficiently explaining their basis in data or logic (regardless of whether the report's data could have sustained the opinion)

2. Forensic purpose unclear (53%)

The legal standard, legal question, or forensic purpose was not stated, not clear, inaccurate, or inappropriate

3. Organization problems (36%)

Information was presented in disorganized manner (usually without a reasonable logic for its sequence)

4. Irrelevant data or opinions (31%)

Data and/or some opinions included in the report were not relevant for the forensic or clinical referral questions

5. Failure to consider alternative hypotheses (30%)

Data allowed for alternative interpretations, while report did not offer explanations concerning why they were ruled out (often response style/malingering alternative, sometimes diagnostic)

6. Inadequate data (28%)

The referral question, case circumstances, or final opinion required additional *types* of data that were not obtained or were not reported, and for which absence was not explained in report

7. Data and interpretation mixed (26%)

Data and interpretations frequently appeared together in section that reports data

8. Over-reliance on single source of data (22%)

An important interpretation/opinion relied wholly on one source of data when corroborating information from multiple sources was needed (often over-reliance on examinee's self-report)

9. Language problems (19%)

Multiple instances of jargon, biased phrases, pejorative terms, or gratuitous comments

10. Improper test uses (15%)

Test data were used in inappropriate ways when interpreted and applied to the case, or tests were not appropriate for the case itself

Note: Reprinted from "Guidance for Improving Forensic Reports: A Review of Common Errors, by T. Grisso, 2010, *Open Access Journal of Forensic Psychology*, Volume 2, pages 110–111. Copyright (2010) by Open Access Journal of Forensic Psychology.

Checklist for Forensic Report Writing

Table 2. Checklist for forensic psychology report writing.

Clarify your role	
o Is your role clear? (e.g. in relation to the client and other associated parties)	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Is there the potential for a dual relationship or other ethical violation?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you discussed the purpose of the report with the examinee?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you discussed limits to confidentiality with the examinee?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you obtained informed consent?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you documented discussions regarding the above in the report?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are you aware of the relevant legislation and case law?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearly state the referral question	
o Is the referral question clear?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o If not have attempts to gain further information been made?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o If the above is not feasible, have you stated your understanding of the referral question and the parameters of the report?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data collection	
o Have you taken a detailed history?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Has all necessary information to answer the referral question been obtained?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you attempted to obtain collateral information?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are the examinee's personal information and dates of evaluation correct?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you relied on multiple sources of data?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are all the sources of data relied upon in the report listed?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are the sources of information clear in the report?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are the psychometric measures used appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you assessed for risk?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make the report easy to read and understand	
o Have you avoided the use of jargon, colloquial or prejudicial language?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are there any unexplained terms? (e.g. 'moderate risk')	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have data not relevant to the referral question been excluded?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are the facts and opinions kept separate? (e.g. is there an 'Opinion' section?)	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Is the reasoning clear and conclusions transparent?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have alternate hypotheses been considered?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you avoided commenting on the ultimate issue?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Are answers to the referral question(s) clearly set out at the end?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal	
o Is there anything about this referral, assessment or report that makes you uncomfortable?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Would you be happy for the process to be made public?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Is there potential for personal bias?	<input type="checkbox"/>
o Have you expressed opinions only on matters for which you are qualified and competent?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reprinted from: Report Writing in the Forensic Context: Recurring Problems and the Use of a Checklist to Address Them, Zwartz, M Psychiatry, Psychology and Law, 2018VOL. 25, NO. 4, 578–588

Interviewing and Report Writing: Clinical Versus Forensic

C: Health Service

F: Legal Service

C: Look for Symptoms to diagnose, personality characteristics

F: Obtaining information for the litigation that when included in your report, will assist the trier of fact.

C: Open-ended, flexible, and more client-directed

F: Determined by the court

C: Take client at face value

F: Challenge the client in order to find accurate data

C: Less confrontational--more accepting and validating

F: Directive and focused with specific objectives

C: Interviewer's notes: for personal use

F: Interviewer's notes: others will look at your files

C: Often privileged

F: Never privileged

C: Verification: usually not undertaken

F: Always undertaken

C: You act as an advocate

F: Do not be an advocate

Proving the Roots of Alienation in Court: Report Writing

Michelle Jones, LCSW; Children 4 Tomorrow, October 29, 2021