

COUNSELOR NOTES

Meeting the **CRITICAL** Standards

*This note meets the
CRITICAL standards!*

Clear & concise
Relevant
Informative
Timely
Includes next step
Complete
Accurate
Legal



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction.....3
- Guidelines.....4
 - Information Specifically Required to Be Noted.....7
 - Examples of Acceptable Notes and Comments.....8
 - Examples of Unacceptable Notes and Comments.....13
 - TAA Exception to Guidelines.....16
- Tools.....20
 - The Basics -- Who, What, Why, When, Where, How?.....20
 - TWIST Counselor Notes Subject Lines Desk Aid.....20
 - More Helpful Desk Aids.....21
 - Sample Questions for Soliciting Required Information.....22
 - FAPO Notes and Comments Desk Aid.....24
- Glossary.....28
- Writing.....29
 - It's Just a Note. What's the Big Deal?.....29
 - The Brutal Truth.....29
 - What Does It All Mean?.....30
 - Organization.....31
 - Tips and Resources.....32

INTRODUCTION

The only acceptable tools that have the capacity to support across-entity communication about our customers are TWIST Counselor Notes and Provider (Vendor) Comments. Notes are an essential part of the Workforce Solutions customer service delivery process used to:

- Record services the customer receives
- Document actions
- Record significant dates, milestones, and credentials
- Provide status updates

Counselor notes tell the story of the customer to a potentially very diverse audience, including:

- Co-workers
- Supervisors
- Managers
- Contractor leadership
- Board staff
- Monitors/auditors (local, state, and federal)
- Customers

Notes and comments should paint a clear picture of what the customer wants and needs; and what the current status is. Any authorized person should be able to read a note and know what's going on with a customer or provider. Well-written notes are critical. They must be **Clear and concise, Relevant, Informative, and Timely**. They must always **Include** next steps; and be **Complete, Accurate, and Legal**. Reviewing the examples and adhering to the information in these guidelines will ensure your notes meet the **CRITICAL** standards established by Workforce Solutions.

Not all counselor notes and provider comments need to be written in narrative form. While most conversations with customers take the traditional narrative form, it is acceptable to use brief or bulleted statements when appropriate. In fact, you may find it is easier to use a combination of both to meet the **CRITICAL** standards. Use your professional judgment to determine a style that best suits the information you are conveying.

Note: This document contains several examples of counselor notes and vendor comments. Their only purpose is to support a guideline or recommendation. **Please do not copy the examples or use them as templates for notes.** And, since policies and procedures frequently change, you shouldn't rely on these examples to interpret other Workforce Solutions policies and procedures. Always check the most current information under Staff Resources on the www.wrksolutions.com website.

GUIDELINES

Writing counselor notes and provider comments is not an exact science. Every situation or circumstance is at least slightly different. And, how we as individuals take in, process, and record information is different. Therefore, establishing hard and fast rules on how to write a counselor note is nearly impossible in most cases. In other words, we can't tell you exactly what to write in every situation.

However, there are general guidelines you can apply. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure quality documentation. Poor documentation can lead to poor customer service, incorrect or duplicative services, confusion, wasted time, disallowed costs, and unsatisfactory reviews.

- 1. USE GOOD JUDGMENT AND COMMON SENSE.** There's no rule that will tell you exactly what to do in every situation. Do what you think is correct based on the information you have and the guidelines in front of you. Remain professional and objective. **Don't include personal opinions, and never make observations that could be construed as demeaning or prejudiced.**
- 2. CUSTOMIZE.** Tailor your notes to each individual and the current situation: needs, progress, services, requests, actions, and next steps. Some notes should be written in narrative and some can simply list pertinent information. A conversation with the customer would probably be written in a narrative format, but something like submission of documents might be a few words or a bulleted list. **Don't cut and paste a note from one customer file to another.**
- 3. WRITE YOUR NOTES DURING THE VISIT.** Make eye contact and actively listen to your customer. Then, ask the customer to stay for a little longer while you make your notes. This allows you to reinforce the information you provided and it allows the customer to clarify information he/she provided. If the customer is reading or completing paperwork, tell her you are going to "jot some notes down" while she does that. Vendor comments should be entered as soon as possible after the event takes place. Counselor notes regarding actions taken should be entered as soon as the action is taken. **Notes and comments must be entered timely. Don't wait too long or you may forget important details.**
- 4. EXPLAIN WHY/SUPPORT YOUR CONCLUSIONS AND DECISIONS.** You probably know exactly why you did something because you used all the information you had available; however, the reader may not be privy to all that information. You need to explain why you did what you did to provide the reader with enough information to understand your reasoning and/or conclusions. An added bonus to this method is that it may prevent you from arriving at a wrong conclusion or making bad decisions. **Don't assume the reader knows what you know and/or will be able to figure it out.**

5. **BE SPECIFIC, KEEP IT RELEVANT, AND STICK TO THE FACTS:** Provide the reader with enough specifics to know what's going on, but keep it relevant. We don't need to know a customer's life story or a vendor's rags to riches history. But, we do need to know how a particular action or service will help a customer find a job or get a vendor up to speed. Stick to the facts at hand and, when appropriate, relate it to the customer's job search status and employment goals. **Leave out unfounded assumptions and unsubstantiated conclusions. NEVER include information about a customer's specific medical conditions or disabilities.**
6. **DOCUMENT ALL ACTIVITIES AND PERTINENT INFORMATION.** Make sure the reader knows what's going on. What did the customer/vendor tell you? What did you observe? What actions were taken? What documentation was submitted? What did you tell the customer/vendor that he/she understood? What's next? **Don't add unnecessary, extraneous, and irrelevant information simply to "cover all the bases."**
7. **ALWAYS INCLUDE THE NEXT STEP.** Counselor notes are not intended to be written as cliffhangers. Always tell the reader and the customer what's going to happen next. And, next steps are different for every customer depending on his/her unique situation. **Don't include only the customer's next step(s). Include yours and other staff's as well.**
8. **WRITE SOMETHING YOU WANT EVERYONE TO READ.** Notes tell the story of the customer's experience throughout the Workforce Solutions service delivery experience. Vendor comments keep us up to date on the interactions we have with Workforce Solutions vendors. They should be well thought out and easy to read. You never know who is reading them – from a co-worker to the Department of Labor and everyone in between. **Don't bore or confuse readers; otherwise, they may stop reading and come to the wrong conclusions.**
9. **USE STANDARD ENGLISH.** In this age of streamlined communication, such as texting and emailing, it's tempting to use the same shortcut language in counselor notes. EX: "Cust cm n2 ofc 2 drop off PW." These kinds of shortcuts are not acceptable in counselor notes. Write in 1st person. If your name is on the note and you are writing the note, write that way. Write in active voice. Active is almost always the better choice; it's easier to read. **Don't use non-standard/unapproved acronyms or abbreviations, even if you think their meaning should be obvious. Never use quotation marks to indicate disbelief or sarcasm.**
10. **BE CONFIDENT.** Your note may be read by someone who really needs to know what's going on. Say what you need to say, no more and no less. **Don't use phrases like "it appears" or "it seems." Don't beat around the bush. Never blame another office or staff person or state that you would have handled a situation differently.**
11. **WRITE AN INCIDENT REPORT INSTEAD OF A COUNSELOR NOTE WHEN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OCCUR.** If a customer reacts in such a way as to cause disruption in the career office or appears irate and complains loudly about services, or makes threats and places others in danger, write an incident report. Describe exactly what happened; leave out your emotions and judgments. List the names of witnesses, and ask your supervisor to review your note. This will give another staff person an accurate accounting of what occurred should the customer call to complain. Record the existence of the incident report in a counselor note. EX: *"Incident report on file at the Westheimer office."* **Don't let your feelings dictate the tone of the incident report; keep it fact-based and professional.**

12. USE WORD. Consider writing your notes using Microsoft Word; then insert the note into the counselor note field in TWIST. This is especially helpful with longer notes. Remember, though, the Spell Check and Grammar Check tools in MS Word are not foolproof. You'll still need to proofread. **Never copy and paste one customer's note to another's.**

13. REVIEW FOR THE CRITICAL CRITERIA. All of the criteria have a separate meaning – make sure your note meets all nine criteria. It must be clear, concise, relevant, informative, and timely; it must include the next step, be complete, accurate, and legal. And, check your organization, grammar, punctuation, and spelling before you save the note. **Don't leave this step out; it will help you identify areas that need revision.**

14. FOLLOW THE WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS COUNSELOR NOTE PROTOCOL:

- Read previous notes, as applicable, before taking any action.
- Enter each note chronologically in an individual and separately posted note.
- Use an approved subject line, when appropriate.
- If the note is long and/or includes several key subjects, separate them into individual notes or double space between key topics,
- Learn which subjects are *required* to be recorded in a counselor note.
- Use the Job Search Map as the employment plan for any customer not in training. If the plan changes, make the change in the Job Search Map and note the change in a separate counselor note. **Don't paste the entire map into the note. Only paste the section you completed. Never copy and paste one customer's Job Search Map to another's. The Job Search Map does not replace the need to enter other relevant information into counselor notes.**

***Note:** If information can be quickly and easily accessed in other parts of the MIS, then it is not necessary to document it in the counselor note, unless it is specifically required. However, if the information is important to the narrative and will help the reader understand what's going on, include it.*

INFORMATION SPECIFICALLY REQUIRED TO BE NOTED

There are certain things that must be noted regardless of whether they can or can't be found in other parts of the MIS. These include:

- ✓ **Adjusting Child Care Absence and Reason**
- ✓ **Any Action Taken on a Customer or Provider Record by FAPO Staff**
- ✓ **Child Care for Online Training Justification**
- ✓ **Employment**
- ✓ **Exit Notes**
- ✓ **Financial Aid Expense Limits**
- ✓ **Granting Good Cause**
- ✓ **Informal Resolutions: Appeals/Complaints**
- ✓ **Justification and Reason for Data Integrity Change Request**
- ✓ **Job Search Map (for customers not in training)**
- ✓ **Job Search Progress**
- ✓ **JS Log/VOH**
- ✓ **Monthly Child Support Calculations**
- ✓ **Monthly FLSA Calculation**
- ✓ **Next Step(s)**
- ✓ **Planned Gap in Service Information: Period/Reason/Future Service**
- ✓ **Selective Service Waiver Justification**
- ✓ **Short Term Financial Aid**
- ✓ **Suspending Financial Aid Child Care**
- ✓ **Test Results and How They Affect Customer Goals**
- ✓ **Training Progress**
- ✓ **Transitional Child Care**
- ✓ **Work Hour Calculations**
- ✓ **Income Calculations for Financial Aid**

For more specific information about what to include in required notes, reference:

- <http://www.wrksolutions.com/staff-resources/issuances/issuances-15/15-08-revised-managing-financial-aid>

EXAMPLES OF ACCEPTABLE NOTES AND COMMENTS

The sole purpose of these examples is to support your understanding of what constitutes an acceptable counselor note. **Do not copy and paste these examples into a counselor note or use them as templates.** Write your own note as necessary – enter as much or as little information as required.

#1 – Job Search

Subject Line: Job Search 5/6-12/2012

Customize

“I suggested he attend the next Interview seminar at our office on 12/12/15, and he agreed.”

Be specific

“Mr. Doe came into the office to drop off his Job Search Log for the week of 5/6/2012-5/12/2012.”

Stick to the facts

“Some of the places to which he applied in person include: Grocer Supply, Handy Hardware, and Mattress Outlet. He also completed three applications, faxed his resume to several places, and had two interviews for warehouse positions.”

Document all activities

“I updated his WIT application, ran a match, and gave him job leads for a warehouse clerk and a warehouse assistant.”

Keep it relevant

“Mr. Doe continues to look for employment as a warehouse clerk. I asked him why he thought he wasn’t finding work, and he expressed concerns about having trouble answering questions in interviews.”

Explain why/support

“Since these employers require applying in person, Mr. Doe requested financial aid for transportation to check on both leads and to continue his job search. I issued one \$20.00 Metro bus pass.”

Include next steps

“Mr. Doe’s next step is to attend the Interview seminar this afternoon, apply for the two job leads tomorrow, continue his job search, and submit his next Job Search Log on Monday, May 21, 2012.”

#2 – Next Step

Subject Line: Next Step Assessment

“John came into the office today with his next step letter. He is currently looking for a position in customer service or any entry level position. He’s had several interviews, but still no job offers. I asked him if he used any of the tips from the Interviewing Tip sheet I gave him last week. He said he read the sheet and tried to apply what he learned, but he still gets nervous. I suggested he attend the Interviewing workshop this afternoon as long as he’s here, and he agreed. John feels confident he will find a job soon and states he doesn’t have any other challenges preventing him from finding a job. I updated his WIT application and gave him two referrals to Wal-Mart and Men’s Wearhouse.

I told John he has exhausted his allowable job search hours and, to continue receiving SNAP benefits, he has to begin workfare on 7/30/12. I have arranged for him to work at HHSC on 7/30/12 under the direction of Gregoria Reyes. He understands he must submit up to his allowable FLSA hours each month until he becomes employed.

John will attend the interviewing workshop this afternoon; then apply for the two job referrals I gave him tomorrow. He will continue job searching and start workfare at HHSC on 7/30/12 if he is still unemployed. I will tell the workshop facilitator to expect John in the workshop this afternoon, and I will continue looking for good job leads. John is due back in the office to submit his _____ on _____.

#2A – Monthly FLSA (Separate Subject Line)

Subject Line: Monthly FLSA

SNAP \$200/\$7.25= 27 hours per month.

#3 – Contact Attempt

Subject Line: Attempt to Contact

“Returned Mary’s phone call at [enter phone number dialed] regarding [enter reason for contact attempt]; left message [voice mail, individual] requesting [enter request].” If I don’t hear back from Mary today, I will try again later this week.

Note: Do not write an Attempt to Contact counselor note that says anything like *“Called, N/A.”* Tell the reader why you were attempting to contact, which phone number(s) you tried, what happened as a result, and what the next step is. EX: *“I tried to call Mary this afternoon at [enter phone number dialed], but that number is no longer in service. I was trying to give her a job lead to [enter job posting #]. I will send a call-in card.”* This tells the other staff what to do when Mary calls and she reaches them instead of you.

#4 – Investigation

Subject Line: Provider Investigation/SIA

Stick to the facts

Be specific

“On July 5, 2012, I received information indicating staff at Make-it-Up Learning Center was in possession of a CCAA swipe card belonging to Mr. Gone. Mr. Gone’s two children, Absent and Notthere Gone, stopped attending Make-it-Up Learning Center on June 20, 2012. The CCAA system showed someone used Mr. Gone’s CCAA card on June 26th to check his children in and out on June 21st and June 22nd. The children did not attend the center on June 21-22.”

Document all activities

Keep it relevant

“On July 5th, we (Snoopy One and Snoopy Two) met with Ms. Uh-Oh, Director of Make-it-Up Learning Center regarding the complaint. Ms. Uh-Oh stated she does not keep CCAA cards at the center. Ms. Uh-Oh said Mr. Gone’s card had been left at the center and she was aware that someone had swiped the card even though his children were not in attendance. Ms. Uh-Oh did not know who swiped Mr. Gone’s card and said that Mr. Gone’s card was no longer at the center.”

Stick to the facts.

Explain why/support conclusions/decisions

“We advised Ms. Uh-Oh that the childcare payment the center received from Workforce Solutions for the days Mr. Gone’s children were not in attendance had to be repaid. Ms. Uh-Oh stated she understood and agreed to reimburse Workforce Solutions in the amount of \$93.72.”

Be specific

Document all activities

“Ms. Uh-Oh signed the Parent Agreement (PA) on July 10, 2012. We will schedule an unannounced visit within six months.”

Include next steps

#5 – Medical Reconsideration

Subject Line: Good Cause

“Mr. Doe is here today in response to an outreach letter. He provided medical documentation indicating he cannot participate in work activities or activities to prepare for work from 08/08/2012-08/08/2013. Because of the length of time that Mr. Doe is expected to be under the doctor’s care, HHSC needs to change his participation code. I granted Good Cause for the month of August 2012. However, until HHSC changes the code, Mr. Doe understands that he needs to follow up with us on the 1st of each month to provide his current status. I gave Mr. Doe a blank Form 1836A. He will have his doctor complete the form; then return it to HHSC. I asked him if he would also bring me a copy.”

#6 – Block Format

Subject Line: Empl & Trng Info/VOH

Ms. Doe came in today to provide the following employment and education information:

Employment Information

08/01/2011
Receptionist
Great Clips
6860 Hwy 6 N
Houston, TX 77084
Contact: Maria
281-859-6870
\$8.50 per hour
20-24 hrs per week

Training Information

LoneStar College
Start Date 08/29/2011
Cy-Fair Location
9191 Barker Cypress Rd
Cypress, TX 77429
281-290-3200
Associates in Nursing
Attending M/W/F, 8:00 am to 1:00 pm
Expected completion date 06/2014

Ms. Doe understands she must return her participation (VOH) form every Monday no later than 5 PM showing a minimum of 20 hours at work and/or in school.

#7 – Work Hour Calculations

Subject Line: Eligibility

“Monica earns \$9.50 an hour and is paid weekly. She provided a check stub reflecting a gross amount of \$238.21. \$238.21 divided by \$9.50 = 25.07 hours which is valid proof she works the required 25 hours per week.”

#8 – Monthly FLSA

Subject Line: Monthly FLSA

“SNAP \$200/\$7.25 = 27 hours/month.”

#9 – Office Incident

Subject Line: Incident

Counselor Note Entry: *“Incident report on file at _____ office.”*

Do not report specifics of the incident in counselor notes. Write a separate incident report and follow your local office procedures. Below is an example of an incident report; NOT a counselor note.

Incident Report Example:

“Ms. Carter came to the office to find out why child care financial aid was discontinued for her 13-year old. She has six additional children in care at this time. I explained that Workforce Solutions cannot provide financial aid for child care for children 13 years and older. Ms. Carter immediately became angry and, screaming loudly, demanded the child be placed back in care. I tried to calm her down and talk about other possible resources provided by other organizations.

Ms. Carter picked up her keys and aimed them to me as if to throw them. She threw the keys to the floor and picked up a chair, held it overhead and aimed as if to throw it at me. At this point, management arrived on the scene and intervened. A small child who arrived with Ms. Carter was taken to a supervisor’s office for safety reasons. The manager asked Ms. Carter to leave the office, but she refused. The manager warned her she would call the police if she did not leave the premises. Ms. Carter continued to refuse to leave and the police were called. Before the police got there, she threw the chair down and pushed the manager. At that point, a co-worker, who has a license to detain individuals behaving in an unruly manner, did so until the police arrived. When the police arrived, they handcuffed Ms. Carter and escorted her to the police car. Then they took statements from everyone involved and left.”

EXAMPLES OF UNACCEPTABLE NOTES AND COMMENTS

Incorrect Example #1

Subject Line: Empl/FA Req/VOH

“Customer has reported new employment with Hirman Memmorial hospital and needs 2 work uniform in order to go to work. 2583 has been faxed to HHSC. She will be working 40 hours a week. She was provided with a 2 Wal-Mart gift cards. She is to turn in a VOH form each Monday. The Support Services Award Contract was rejected by the processing unit. It has been corrected and re-scanned.”

What’s wrong?

MISSING SOME EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION, UNNECESSARY VERBIAGE, AMOUNT OF UNIFORMS AND GIFT CARDS MISSING, NOT WRITTEN IN ACTIVE VOICE, NOT ADEQUATELY PROOFED.

Corrected to:

Subject Line: Empl/FA Req/VOH

“On 7/18/2012 Ms. Jones reported employment beginning on 7/16/2012 at Hermann Memorial Hospital as a Medical Assistant making \$8.50/hour working 40 hours/week. Her supervisor is Linda Green whose contact number is (713)923-7812. Herman Memorial Hospital is located at 5600 Fannin, Houston, Texas 77054.

Ms. Jones needs financial aid to purchase two work uniforms, at \$25/each, at Wal-Mart. I issued two \$25 Wal-Mart gift cards to purchase the uniforms and submitted the 2583 to HHSC to report Ms. Jones's employment. Mrs. Jones understands she needs to submit a VOH form every Monday reporting the hours she worked and that her first one is due Monday, July 23, 2012 I reminded her to report any changes in her employment status.

Note: The cash sub request rejection is an internal process that doesn't belong in a counselor note.

Incorrect Example #2

Subject Line: Drinking Problem

“Jen is here in the office today she smells like she has been drinking, she wanted transportation assistance to go to an “Interview”. I asked Jen if she had been drinking and inquired about her “Interview” she indicated that she doesn’t have to answer the questions that I am asking of her and that she just needs a gas card to get to her interview. The last time she was in here she smelled like a brewery. She really has a drinking problem. At this time I have assessed that I will not provide her with a gas card because she was so rude and I do not feel that she will use the assistance to get to her interview; she’ll probably use it to buy beer.”

What’s wrong?

PERSONAL OPINION, UNSUBSTANTIATED CONCLUSION, POTENTIALLY ILLEGAL QUESTIONING, NEGATIVE OBSERVATIONS, DECISION BASED ON FEELINGS/ASSUMPTIONS, INAPPROPRIATE USE OF QUOTATION MARKS, UNNECESSARY VERBIAGE, FAILURE TO PROOFREAD OR PUNCTUATE CORRECTLY.

Corrected to:

Subject Line: Support Services Requested

“Jen came in today to request a bus pass to go to an interview. When she sat down at my desk, I smelled alcohol on her breath. I asked Jen if I could address something personal and she said yes. I told her I smelled alcohol on her breath and was concerned that would affect her interview. Jen said she drank a lot the night before, but hadn’t had anything to drink since then, and that her interview is tomorrow.

I congratulated Jen on securing a job interview and asked her who it was with and how she felt about it. She’s interviewing for a clerical position at the Plaza Medical Center tomorrow morning and feels confident she will do well. She allowed me to ask her a couple of typical interview questions for practice and she answered them well. She described an appropriate outfit with accessories for this type of interview. I gave Jen a \$10 bus pass and asked her if she would consider some advice. She said yes, so I advised her to do whatever she needs to do to avoid having alcohol on her breath for the interview. She agreed and said she would call to let me know how it goes.”

Incorrect Example #3

Subject Line: Bad Experience

“Harry came into the office today indicating he went to the ABC Street Workforce Solutions office and they were rude to him. He said Mrs. Jones was unwilling to assist him with his needs and wouldn’t give him a referral he wanted. I told Harry that we always get complaints about that office even though they are overstaffed, and I apologized about the service that he received. I’m not sure why he went to the office because he usually comes here to turn in his job search log for SNAP E&T. Harry indicated his son has a baseball game tonight and asked me if I could hurry. His son is an All-Star on the Pearland team, and if they win this game, they’ll go to Regionals. I told him I had a son who played baseball, too. We showed each other pictures of our kids, and I assured Harry that I was here to help him with his job search needs today.”

What’s wrong?

PLACED BLAME, BAD-MOUTHED OFFICE, PROVIDED INACCURATE/UNSUBSTANTIATED INFORMATION, INCLUDED IRRELEVANT INFORMATION, FAILED TO NOTE ACTIVITIES OR NEXT STEPS.

Corrected to:

Subject Line: Job Search Progress

“Harry came in today for a referral to Union Pacific. I explained to Harry that the company requested we close the posting because they have enough people to interview. I asked him if he would like me to look for anything else, found two job leads and made the referrals. Harry will check out the two job leads and return a completed job search log on 10/1/12. I updated his WIT application to indicate an interest in railroad work.”

Note: You should report Harry’s description of his experience at the other office to your supervisor, but do not enter the information in a counselor note.

TAA EXCEPTION TO GUIDELINES

The only exception to the rule about using templates for counselor notes is when the subject relates to anything about Trade Act Assistance (TAA). The Texas Workforce Commission staff uses TAA notes to gather information and make decisions about customer eligibility, services, and activities. They prefer to get the information from the templates and language developed by TWC below.

A. TAA Initial Visit

- a. EOS, LMI, skills, abilities, first 3 sections of REP completed, waiver
- b. **(Name of Customer)** came in and met with **(career advisor)** to discuss interest or additional information about the TAA program. We discussed the six approval criteria requirements for TAA training and verified that the customer did qualify for TAA program. **(Customer's name)** informed of their maximum timeframe for training **(104,130,156)**. We discussed the customer's current, previous skills and abilities. The customer stated they were interested in **(occupation)** and we discussed the LMI of interested occupation. It was determined that **(results of LMI research and assessment for previous and current interested training/occupational goal)**. The EOS-1 form was discussed, signed and a copy given to the customer. The first two sections of the REP were completed. Informed the customer that training must be full time at all times. Self-financing of any required cost of training is not allowed. The customer signed the EOS-1 that indicated the waiver in deadline **(include date)** and the importance of being in training prior to the deadline.
- c. AWW calculation for a trade-affected customer:
 1. Trade affected employer: **(Employer's name)**
 2. Application date: **(Date)(Quarters available 3-2012 to 3-2013)**
 3. Separation date: **(Date) Quarter 2-2013)**
 4. Highest quarter wage: **(Quarter 2-2013 (\$\$,\$\$\$.\$\$)**
 5. Average weekly wage: **(\$\$,\$\$\$.\$\$/13 = \$,\$\$\$.\$\$)**

NOTE: Inform clients about the deadline even if it has passed. If it has passed, document why the customer no longer qualifies for the waiver.

B. TAA Waiver

- a. A waiver **(was/was not)** issued to **(customer's name)** for **(list reason)** with a copy given to the customer and **(he/she)** was informed of their requirement to contact the career advisor every 30 days. **(Customer's name)** was provided with their next apt date **(list date)** and provided with **(curriculum outline, or information)** items needed to submit training request and make sure that it meets the approval criteria.
- b. A waiver was issued to **(customer's name)** for **(list reason)**. **(He/She)** was provided with the expiration date and informed of their responsibility to contact the career advisor every 30 days.

- c. **Waiver review case note:** **(Customer's name)** contacted the career advisor via **(phone call, email, or visit)** in accordance to their requirement for 30-day contact. Waiver reason **(list reason)** still applies because **(list reason)**.
 - d. **Waiver denial:** A recommendation of the denial of the waiver was submitted to the State for approval.
 - e. **Waiver revocation:** A recommendation of the revocation of the waiver **(list waiver/reason)** was submitted to the State for approval.
 - f. **Waiver modification:** The original waiver **(list reason)** modified to a new waiver reason **(list reason)**.
- Lack of 30-day contact:** **(Customer's name)** did not contact **(insert career advisor's name)** by 30 agreement as per WOTC-1 form signed on **(insert date)**.

C. TAA Training Approval

- a. **(Customer's name)** has been approved for **(list training institution, occupational goal, and timeframe)**. **He/She** was accepted into **(list institution)**. This program meets all six of the TAA approval criteria. **(He/She)** was informed of the following:
 1. The training program must be amended and approved prior to any changes in the curriculum
 2. The customer must inform the career advisor immediately if they withdraw from training.
 3. TRA will not be paid during periods of part time attendance.
 4. **(Customer's name)** must have sufficient financial resources to continue training for periods when TRA is not paid.
 5. **(Customer's name)** was informed that TRA might not last the entire length of training.
 6. Include the following:
 1. Start Date: ----
 2. End Date: ----
 3. Training Cost: ----
- b. A copy of the signed REP was given to the customer.
- c. The customer was informed of their benchmark requirements and the next apt date **(list date)** in order to provide their attestation form. **(If applicable)**.

D. TAA Current Training Status

- a. **(Customer's name)** is currently attending **(full-time/part time)** training at **(list institution)** with an occupational goal of **(list occupation)**. **List semester, courses, start, and end dates, total number of weeks along with the credit hours.**
- b. **Part-time:** **list semester, courses, start and end dates, total number of weeks along with the credit hours. (NOTE: apply when status changes due to dropping/withdrawal from courses).**

- c. **(Customer's name)** came to the office and provided their **(unofficial transcript or report card)** confirming their course work for **(list semester)**. They **(are/are not)** on track to complete their training.

E. TAA Amendments

- a. An amendment to **(customer's name)** training was done due to **(list the reason)**. **(List name of customer)** was originally approved for training reflecting the following information.

(Original) Training Institution Information 1: ----

Training Period: ----

Course/Program Name: ----

(List name of customer) amended her training to reflect the following information: ----

(Amended) Training Institution Information 1: ----

Training Period: ----

Cost of Training: ----

Tuition: ----

Total Costs: ----

Include the original information and what is being amended in the case note.

- b. **Extension of training:** **(Customer's name)** training has been extended due to the following **(list reason)**. The extension still allows the customer to complete within the required timeframe **(list timeframe)**.

F. TAA Dropped/ Program Continuing/Entered Employment/Completed Training

- a. **(Customer's name)** has dropped from the training effective **(list date)** due to **(list reason)**. Career advisor has closed service tracking and program detail to reflect the effective date.
- b. **(Customer's name)** has been placed in program continuing status due to **(list reason)**. Career advisor is aware this will place the case under in active status. Customer has been advised to inform career advisor as soon as a change in status has occurred.
- c. **(Customer's name)** has notified career advisor they have accepted a position with (list employer information) effective **(list date)**. The career advisor has closed service tracking, program detail, and entered employment information in performance outcome tab.
- d. **(Customer's name)** has completed TAA approved training effective **(list date)** in **(list training and occupational goal)**. The customer provided **(list certificate, diploma, or degree)** as proof. The career advisor has closed service tracking, program detail, and entered credential information in performance outcome tab.

G. TAA Remedial

- a. **(Customer's name)** was registered for **(list # of courses)** remedial courses during the **(list semester)**. The classes were **(list name of courses)**. Each course was **(list # of credit hours)** for a total of **(list total #)**. The enrollment period was **(list dates)** for a total of **(list total # of weeks)**.
- b. **NOTE: Use same documentation when discussing prerequisites.**

H. TAA Benchmark Review

- a. **(Customer's name)** came to the office to provide the required documentation for their **(list #)** day benchmark review. Customer is currently in **(list semester/year)** and is taking the following courses/modules in a full time capacity **(include total hours)**.

1. Start date:

2. End date:

1. **List name of courses and grades**

- b. **(Customer's name)** is in good standing and will complete training within the scheduled timeframe for this benchmark review. The next benchmark is scheduled for **(list date)**. **(He/she)** was reminded to notify career advisor of any changes regarding courses or grades.

NOTE: Please indicate in case notes whether the customer is in good academic standing (or not) and making satisfactory progress (or not) and what documentation the customer provided during each review. (Instructor attestation, email, phone call, fax, or unofficial transcript).

- c. **Benchmark Warning**

(Customer's name) came to the office in order to provide the required documentation for their **(list #)** day benchmark review. **(He/She)** is currently in **(list semester/year)** and is taking the following courses/modules in a full time capacity **(include total hours)**.

1. **List name of courses and grades**

(Customer's name) is not in good academic standing and may not complete training within the scheduled timeframe for this benchmark review. Career advisor issued customer a warning **(list if 1st or 2nd warning)**. At the next review, the customer needs to have improved grades or REP will need to be adjusted to reflect changes that may include an occupational adjustment or a recommendation for termination of training. Career advisor will continue to monitor customer in reference to grades and timeframe. The next benchmark is scheduled for **(list date)**, to provide **(list documentation to provide)**. During that review, the REP may need to be amended due to second warning. Customer was reminded to notify career advisor of any changes with courses and or grades so immediate action may be taken.

I. TAA Justification of above reasonable cost/Recommendation of Denial of training

- a. This is the lowest and most reasonable cost for the selected occupation.

(Customer's name), requested training for **(list name of occupational training)** at **(list name of institution)**. This program will begin on **(list beginning and end date)**.

The **(list name of institution)** has accepted **(customer's name)** into the program. This program will assist **(customer's name)** in gaining long-term sustainable employment in a timely manner. The other area provider **(list the reason for the other provider not being a viable option)**. The local office recommends approval from the State TAA unit since the training exceeds the reasonable cost.

- b. Recommending denial of **(customer's name)** training plan for **(list reason: one of six approval criteria, or three considerations; list all that applies for denial)**.

J. TAA Job Search Assistance/Relocation

(Customer's name) came in and requested **(name of document)** on **(list date of request)**. The career advisor provided **(name of document)** and informed **(him/her)** they would need to send the document and address any questions to the TAA State Office.

TOOLS

The Basics -- Who, What, When, Where, Why, How.

This approach to writing counselor notes has been around a long time. It's a good way to remember the key points you need to record. Things like:

- Who is doing what? Who are the parties involved?
- What does the customer want and need? Activities? Services? What does the provider need to do? What did you do? What was reported to you? What happened? What funds can be used? What is the status/progress? What was sent to the customer/provider? What is the request? What are the next steps?
- When will the customer report back? When will services or activities start and end. When is the time limit/eligibility period? When is the certification date? When are documents due?
- Where is the customer? Where is the activity: interview/job/community service/college/career office?
- Why did you make a particular decision? Why did the customer do what she did?
- How did you come to a particular conclusion? How is the customer/provider going to follow the plan? How was the customer or provider contacted? How were hours/income/payments calculated?

TWIST Counselor Notes Subject Lines Desk Aid

The purpose of this desk aid is to provide you with a tool to ensure consistent and accurate TWIST counselor notes subject lines. Consistent use of accurate subject lines allows users from anywhere in the system to easily locate notes by topic. This will improve our ability to quickly identify what has transpired, and if necessary, relay that information to customers, co-workers, supervisors, managers, and board staff. It also helps to ensure appropriate actions are taken.

Using agreed-upon and descriptive counselor note subject lines streamlines the process for getting up to speed on a customer's current situation, adds value to the counselor notes tool, ensures appropriate services are delivered, and improves system-wide communication. The [desk aid](#) is located on the Workforce Solutions website.

More Helpful Desk Aids

- **Work Search Assessment Desk Aid**

Use this desk aid to assess the customer's work search. Don't use it as a form or ask the customer to complete it. That's not what it's for. Just use it to help you guide the discussion.

- **Comprehensive Needs Assessment Desk Aid**

This desk aid will help you develop the employment plan. The [desk aid](#) is located on the Workforce Solutions website.

- **Potential Challenges to Finding and/or Keeping a Job**

Use this desk aid as a guide for identifying common challenges. The [desk aid](#) is located on the Workforce Solutions website.

- **The Job Search Map and Instructions**

- **Telephone Follow-up for Working Customers Tagged as TANF**

Desk aids located on the Workforce Solutions website at: <http://www.wrksolutions.com/staff-resources/performance-improvement/desk-aids>.

Sample Questions for Soliciting Required Information

Questions to ask about a customer's interest in further Education or Training might include:

- ✓ What is the reason for the visit?
- ✓ What is the type of assistance needed and why?
- ✓ What is the customer's education level?
- ✓ What type of work experience does the customer have?
- ✓ What are the customer's employment goals?
- ✓ How will further education or training help the customer?
- ✓ Why was a particular school or training chosen?
- ✓ Is the training for an occupation supported by a Workforce Solutions scholarship?
Reference:
http://www.wrksolutions.com/Documents/Individuals/faj/highskillprofile/High-Skill_High-Growth_Occupations.pdfWhen does training start and end?
- ✓ How many days/week is the training?
- ✓ How many hours will be completed and what type of certificate will be obtained?
- ✓ What is the cost of training?
- ✓ How will the customer support his/herself while attending school?
- ✓ How many members are in the customer's family?
- ✓ Who is the sole provider?
- ✓ Is the customer or family receiving public assistance? If so, what type?
- ✓ Was selective service verified?
- ✓ What documents were completed?
- ✓ Which documents were used to determine eligibility?
- ✓ Does the customer understand her rights and responsibilities?
- ✓ What's the next step?

Questions to ask about a customer's Job Search might include:

- ✓ What is the reason for the visit?
- ✓ How is job search going?
- ✓ What concerns do you or the customer have?
- ✓ What advice did you give?
- ✓ What assistance did you provide?
- ✓ Were the hours sufficient to conduct a productive job search and meet the weekly requirement?
- ✓ How is the customer applying for most jobs?
- ✓ Did any jobs result in interviews?
- ✓ Were job leads provided?
- ✓ Was the WIT application updated?
- ✓ Is the customer following the employment plan?
- ✓ Does the customer understand her rights and responsibilities?
- ✓ What's the next step?

Questions to ask about a customer's need for Support Services might include:

- ✓ What are the specific needs?
- ✓ What is the customer able to contribute?
- ✓ How much does the customer need?
- ✓ Has the customer already reached the \$200 limit?
- ✓ Is there a recoupment plan in place?
- ✓ How many hours is the customer working and/or attending school?
- ✓ Does the customer understand her rights and responsibilities?

FAPO Notes and Comments Desk Aid

This desk aid provides Financial Aid Payment Office staff guidance on what to include in TWIST counselor notes and provider comments.

Subject Line	Include														
Return Letter Received	Type of Letter: Date Returned: Address Verification: Re-mailed:														
Void Attendance Letter	% Letter printed but not mailed because absences were reduced to ##.														
__% Attendance Letter	Child's name: # of absences: Date mailed: End Date:														
CCAA Card	Reason: Address Verification: Action:														
Do Not Transfer	Outstanding bal: Vendor: Date Submitted:														
Facility Closure	Closure Date: Reason: Method of Notification: Expected date to re-open:														
Non Payment Parent Fee 1/2/3	Outstanding bal: Date Submitted: Vendor: Final Outcome (3):														
Non Pymt Termination	<table border="0"> <tr> <td><u>Parent Fee</u></td> <td><u>Recoup</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Outstanding bal:</td> <td>Past Due Amt:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Date Submitted:</td> <td>Month(s) unpaid:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Vendor:</td> <td>End date:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End date:</td> <td>Spoke to:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spoke to:</td> <td>FACS Issue #:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>FACS issue #:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	<u>Parent Fee</u>	<u>Recoup</u>	Outstanding bal:	Past Due Amt:	Date Submitted:	Month(s) unpaid:	Vendor:	End date:	End date:	Spoke to:	Spoke to:	FACS Issue #:	FACS issue #:	
<u>Parent Fee</u>	<u>Recoup</u>														
Outstanding bal:	Past Due Amt:														
Date Submitted:	Month(s) unpaid:														
Vendor:	End date:														
End date:	Spoke to:														
Spoke to:	FACS Issue #:														
FACS issue #:															
Parent Withdrawal:	Date Notified: Spoke to: Current month's fee: FACS issue #:														
Recoup Pymt Late Note	Past Due Amt: Month: Grace Pymt Due Date: Result:														

Subject Line	Do Include
Transfer Provider	Transfer from: Verified by: Transfer To: Verified by: Effective Date: End Date: Parent Fee: 2450: M/F/e-M
Vendor Refunded \$\$	Amount: Service Type: Date:
1 st Recoup Notice	Date mailed: Amt: Dates of Recoup: Response Due:
2 nd Recoup Notice	Failed to response to 1 st notice Response Due:
Recoup Pymt Agr Recv'd	Agreement and 1 st payment received Plan: 3/6/9/12/18 month Status: Eligibility can be re-determined
3-Day No Show	End Date: Verified by: Parent fee: FACS issue #: 2450: Mailed/faxed/E-mailed
5-Day No Contact	End Date: Verified by: Parent fee: FACS issue #: 2450: Mailed/faxed/E-mailed
5/6 year old project	Date Mailed: Response Due: Child's Name:
Adverse Action	Status: State Agency: Action taken: End date:
Agreement Renewal	Mailed Agreement: Signed Agreement returned:
Change of Contact Info	Document the change

Subject Line	Do Include
Close Intake	Reason: Notified by: End Date: Action:
Collection of Attend Card	Date collected: Vendor: Action Taken: Action Required:
Collection of POS Machine	Reason: Date Collected: Action Taken: Machine status:
Corrective Action	Status: State Agency: Action taken: End Date:
Emergency Closure	Date(s) Reason: Re-open Date:
IRS Levy	Date: Type: Frequency:
TWC Freeze	Date: Type: Frequency:
Payment Dispute:	Explanation of situation: Reason for dispute: End Result:
POS Machine Malfunction	Dates: ACS Notified by provider:
Rate change	Effective Date:
Recoupment (Vendor)	Period: Amount:
Refusal of Service	Date Notified: Notified by:
Service Improvement Agr (SIA)	Reason: Follow up date:
Recoup-Do Not Allow	Amount Due: Status: Ineligible must pay in full
Recoup-Allow w/Pymt Agr	Amount Due: Status: Parent must agree to repay before eligibility can be re-determined

Subject Line	Do Include
Recoup-No Violation	Violation not found Eligibility can be re-determined
TWC Review	Facts forwarded to TWC OI Ineligible for financial aid until further notice
Vendor Enrollment	Signed Forms Received: Forms Completed: Direct Deposit or Chase(Date Entered): Set up in Vendor Portal: Permanent or Initial License: Effective Date:
Vendor Maintenance	Form(s) Updated/Mailed: Signed Forms Returned: Action Taken: Effective Date of Action:

GLOSSARY

Accurate: Free from error; consistent with WFS standards of customer service.
Ambiguous: Having several meanings; open to multiple interpretations; equivocal; doubtful; difficult to comprehend; lacking clearness or definiteness.
Clear: Easily understood; without ambiguity; distinct; evident; plain; free from confusion, uncertainty, or doubt; entirely comprehensible; completely understood
Complete: Includes all necessary components (who? what? when? where? why? how? and next step).
Concise: Brief in form, but includes everything reader needs to know.
Cryptic: Too abrupt, curt, or brusque
Efficient: Written with the least time and effort; “get to the point.”
Employment-related: The end result pertains to gaining employment.
Informative: Provide enough information to understand what is going on with the customer.
Legal: Permissible according to WFS policies and local, state and federal laws. Cannot contain criminal background information, medical or medical diagnosis or anything else that violates EEO/ADA laws.
Nonjudgmental: Not judging on the basis of your personal standards, values, or opinions which may differ from the customer.
Organized: Information follows the prescribed sequenced order.
Rational: Shows clear thought and free of personal emotions.
Relevant: Relating to the matter at hand.
Significant: Having or likely to have influence or effect: important; related to customer’s employment goal
Succinct: Expressed in few words.
Timely: Entered immediately after action or during/immediately after discussion.
Thorough: Accurate or careful/ related to topic.

WRITING

OK, now that you know what should and shouldn't be in a note, it's time to think about properly composing a note.

It's Just a "Note." What's the Big Deal?

Organization and proper use of English is as important in counselor notes as it is in a business setting. Contrary to popular belief, the word "note" doesn't mean you don't have to write well or follow the rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. It just means it's a shorter, less formal form of written communication. It's not a text message and it's not an essay. It's not a post-it, and it's not a letter. It's somewhere in between and requires utmost care in writing. In fact, you could probably make the argument that organization, grammar, punctuation, and spelling are even MORE important in a note because you don't have a lot of time or space to explain what you mean!

The cost of poorly written counselor notes may seem subtle or indirect, but in reality, it can be substantial. A bad note can translate into misunderstandings, extra work, additional phone calls, poor customer service, and disallowed costs. You know how a global positioning system (GPS) can quickly get you from point A to point B? Or, how it can send you around in circles? It's the same with organization, grammar, punctuation, and spelling (OGPS). Used properly, it moves the reader quickly from point A to point B. Used incorrectly, the reader goes around and around trying to figure out what your note means.

The Brutal Truth

It's easy to blame the reader for his/her lack of understanding of your note. After all, you knew what you meant, right? The truth is... it's the writer's responsibility to write in such a manner as to ensure the reader understands the message. If the reader doesn't understand what you wrote, the fault is likely yours. This concept is hard to swallow, but the sooner you accept it, the sooner you realize how important good writing is. We're not saying you have to be perfect or that everyone should run out and get a degree in English. The most common writing problems – lack of audience definition, unclear purpose, poor organization, inappropriate expression, and inefficiency – are easy to address.

Wouldn't it be nice to swallow a pill that magically improves your writing? Or read a one page desk aid and instantly become a good writer? Sorry – not going to happen. Wishing you were a better writer doesn't work; trust us on this. Becoming a better writer takes a concerted, conscious effort to improve. You have to figure out what you're doing wrong; study the rules around your weaknesses; and apply the rules as you write.

Look at your writing and ask yourself:

- Did I use a Subject Line that accurately describes the subject of the note?
- Did I consider the reader’s point of view?
- Did I organize it so the reader doesn’t have to read it repeatedly?
- Do I know the difference between active and passive voice? If so, did I stick mainly to active voice?
- Did I use simple, familiar words to communicate clearly?
- Did I avoid jargon and too technical terms?
- Did I get rid of all the unnecessary words?
- Are my sentences a reasonable length?
- Did I use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling?
- Did I edit it before I saved it?

If you can honestly answer yes to all of these questions, you’re probably a solid writer. If you’re beginning to ponder the quality of your counselor notes, read on. It takes a while, but writing is a form of art that can be learned. Fortunately, there are some common, easily understood rules to use and some fun resources to help you improve.

What Does It All Mean?

Good writing is...	That means...
Focused on the intended audience	Who are the readers? What are they looking for? In the case of counselor notes, the readers could have very diverse perspectives.
Action-oriented	What did you do? What did the customer do? What do you want the reader to do? What happened and what’s happening next? This is where you include the “who, what, where, why, and how” answers.
Organized	Ideas are sequenced to flow smoothly, clearly, and concisely. The reader can easily follow your thoughts and rarely has to read the note more than once.
Expressive	The tone and style of the writing is professional and positive.
Efficient	The note is clear, brief, and concise; it doesn’t bore the reader with redundant and unnecessary information. It gets to the point but covers what’s necessary.

Organization!

Even notes need to be organized. It may not require the same effort as organizing a report, but the organization of any message is a key to its success. First, determine the purpose of the note; then arrange your statements in a logical sequence around the purpose. This helps eliminate extraneous information.

Combine groups of sentences that relate to a central idea or topic into paragraphs. Start with the central idea or problem; then follow with ideas and facts that support it. Here's a good example of how to organize your writing:

In this opening statement, the problem is identified in the first sentence. It is further explained and supported with facts in the remaining sentences.

“On July 5, 2012, I received information that workers at Make-it-Up Learning Center were in possession of a CCAA swipe card belonging to Mr. Gone. The card was swiped on days his children were not in attendance. Mr. Gone’s two children, Absent and Notthere Gone, stopped attending Make-it-Up Learning Center on June 20, 2012. However, the CCAA system showed someone used Mr. Gone’s card on June 26th to check his children in and out on June 21st and June 22nd.”

In the second paragraph, the next step (investigation) is introduced in the first sentence. It's followed by the findings of the investigation.

That same day, we (Snoopy One and Snoopy Two) met with Ms. Uh-Oh, Director of Make-it-Up Learning Center regarding this complaint. Ms. Uh-Oh stated she does not keep CCAA cards at the center. However, she said Mr. Gone’s card had been left at the center and she was aware that someone had swiped the card even though his children were not in attendance. Ms. Uh-Oh did not know who swiped Mr. Gone’s card and said that Mr. Gone’s card was no longer at the center.

In this final paragraph, the end of the story is introduced. It is followed by the details of the final resolution to the problem.

“We told Ms. Uh-Oh the center would have to repay the payment received from Workforce Solutions for the days Mr. Gone’s children were not in attendance. Ms. Uh-Oh stated that she understood and agreed to reimburse Workforce Solutions in the amount of \$93.72. Ms. Uh-Oh signed the Parent Agreement (PA) on July 10, 2012. We will visit the center unannounced in the next six months.”

Situation (unauthorized use of a CCAA card by a provider)– **Action** (investigate) -- **Findings** (Ms. Uh-Oh admitted it happened)– **Results** (Ms. Uh-Oh has to repay and sign an PA) – **Next Step** (FAPO staff will make an unannounced visit).

Tips and Resources

If you could use a little more help with your written command of the English language, consider one of these:

- Take a free course online.
- Take the NWI Business Writing class.
- Ask a colleague for feedback.
- Get some fun, easy-to-use references. Two good ones: *Woe is I* and *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*.
- Take a course at the local community college.
- Read examples of good notes.
- Read examples of bad notes.
- Practice.