Handout 6: Recording Information

There are a number of advantages that written forms have over spoken ones, as they:

- can be read by several people at different times
- do not suffer from 'Chinese Whispers', where spoken messages become distorted as they circulate
- can ensure messages do get through (both physically and psychologically)
- can be copied, stored, retrieved, checked, quoted, and referred to in the future
- form a 'paper trail', so a sequence of events can be reconstructed
- are more official than speech, and more likely to get a considered reply

Caution: Literacy cannot always be assumed. When dealing with young, disadvantaged, or people from linguistically diverse backgrounds, there is no guarantee that the written word will be understood. Without immediate feedback - and some people won't admit to not being able to read well - there is no way of knowing this. Also, some people just don't like reading, and simply will not bother with a substantial amount of text. Tactfully check the person's literacy level if you are in doubt, and avoid overloading them with unnecessary documents.

Objective vs. Subjective Language

To use subjective language is to give opinions. We do it all the time when we talk to people. In the more formal types of written communication - letters, reports, daily logbooks, case notes- we must be careful when using subjective language. Unlike facts (used in objective language), opinions can't really be proven. Opinions should be prefaced by "I feel that...", or "My opinion is that...". Not only is this 'safer' in that you are not purporting to be making statements of fact, but it is less likely to arouse hostility when others contest your statements.

Objective language presents observation but avoids interpretation. "He threw a chair toward me" is an objective statement. "He tried to kill me with a chair" is a subjective one. Objectivity removes emotion and interpretation from the message. Objective statements can are more able to be verified, particularly if there are witnesses present.
### Objective | Subjective
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It is 33 degrees outside | It's a stinking hot day
She looked at the floor most of the time | She was acting guiltily
The children appear healthy | She is a good mother
He said he drinks a bottle of vodka each day | He is an alcoholic
If his marks do not improve he will fail the course | He'd be better off in another course
Bank statement | Valentine's Day Card

Keep facts and opinions separate in your writing. The more formal the document the more objective it should be. Beware of using subjective statements that could come across as being judgement or biased.