



Tip Sheet

How to Write a Procedure

The purpose of this Tip Sheet is to provide guidance on writing procedures. Here are a few thoughts to keep in mind as you begin the process:

- **Write procedures for your staff, not for COA.**

The audience for your organization's procedures is the staff who will be implementing them, not COA's peer reviewers.

- **Procedures must be useable by staff in their day-to-day work.**

Simple, clear language is best. Also, they need to be readily available to staff who may need to refer to them. Since the accreditation process is likely to result in a number of new procedures, this is especially important soon after they are initially adopted.

- **For the most part COA does not expect staff to have procedures memorized, but they should have at least a basic familiarity with their content.**

For example, staff do not need to memorize the steps for making a grievance but they should have a copy, or know where to get a copy should they wish. On the other hand, where procedures define the day-to-day work of a staff member, i.e., staff conducting assessment or working with service recipients to develop service plans, the staff member should know how to perform their job without having to continually refer to written procedures.

- **When writing a procedure, start with what you already have.**

Don't reinvent the wheel. It's very likely that your organization is already doing most of what the standards require. And chances are that it works. So build on what you already have and are doing and work toward the standards. This may mean formalizing practices that have been informal or not written down at all.

- **Procedures should reflect all applicable legal and regulatory requirements, not just COA standards.**

Confidentiality procedures, for example, should integrate federal, state, and any other confidentiality requirements as well as COA standards; otherwise they will not be able to provide needed guidance to staff on this important issue. Do not keep a separate set of procedures for the state licensing division and one for COA.

- **Address all Practice Standards in a section.**

In some cases the Evidence Tables simply state the need to provide procedures. For example, the evidence listed in the Self-Study Documents column of most service sections instructs the organization to provide "Service Planning and Monitoring Procedures." In such cases, it is expected that these procedures will address the requirements of all the Practice Standards under the Service Planning and Monitoring Core Concept.

Following is more specific guidance on how to write a procedure.



1. Use a header on your procedures that includes the following or similar information:

Procedure Name	Staff Grievance Procedures
Relevant Policy	Non-Discrimination Policy [not all procedures need a policy]
Applicable to:	All staff and volunteers
Location	Employee Manual
Effective Date	July 4, 1776
Date(s) of Revision	February 9, 2046
Legal and Other References	Office of Mental Health regulations (OMH 128: 14-35); COA Standards number (HR 2.04)

2. Tips for writing the procedure

- a. A procedure is a set of instructions that outlines the steps for performing a task(s).
- b. A procedure should tell someone **how** to do something not just **what** to do.
- c. A procedure breaks a task or tasks into discrete sequential steps.
- d. A procedure uses short, active voice/action statements. “Do this” is better than “should do this.” For example, “Place a copy of the signed consent form in the person’s case record.”
- e. A procedure includes timeframes and document expectations, when appropriate. These can include signatures, copies of forms, case notes, etc.
- f. Finally, it is important to test the procedures before fully implementing them.

3. A procedure can be a step-by-step outline or a process description

- a. A step-by-step outline breaks the task or tasks into discrete steps. Steps are sequential. Each step is numbered. Try to limit each step to a single activity.
- b. A process description is written as a narrative.

4. Include authorizing signatures

Executive Director _____	Date _____
HR Director _____	Date _____

5. Include a footer. Also, page numbers are important for multi-page procedures. For example: