

Anecdotal Observation Handout

Anecdotal observations are directly observed occurrences that are clearly and concisely written in a nonjudgmental manner in the past tense. A journalist approach is used when writing anecdotal records. This is a factual account of a single incident answering the who, what, where, when and how of the incident. It is up to the observer to determine if the when and where are relevant to the factual record of the incident. A well-written anecdotal observation will provide the reader with a clear picture of what exactly transpired much like a video recording the reader will be able to “see” and “hear” exactly what was said and done. There is NO interpretation or subjective words used within an anecdotal observation. An anecdotal record may be of an incident that lasted a few seconds to several minutes.

Below are some key points from Sheryl Nicolson and Susan G. Shipstead book, “Through the Looking Glass, Observation in the Early Childhood Classroom”, 2002.

- A. *Definition*: An observational method used to summarize a single developmental incident after it occurs. The summary records who, what, how, and sometimes *when* and/or *where*. This method documents incidents involving individuals and/or groups.
- B. When Writing an Anecdote
- Observes the incident
 - Identify if the incident is valuable (developmentally significant), [or for purposes of this course significant to Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) or other topics you are learning about in this course.
 - Complete the process by writing it down after it has occurred.
 - The account is transcribed from memory; it preserves an important developmental moment and provides a permanent record of a child’s growth and trends [or individual’s growth, behavior, etc].
 - Anecdotal records are most reliable if jotted down as soon as possible after the event, when things are still clear in your memory. [When you are a teacher on the floor this is not always possible to use key words to help jog your memory later.]
 - Interpretation or developmental significance notation is written up separately from the observation.

C. Well Written Anecdotal Records include:

- Give a brief description to build a visual image of the setting
- Summarizes how the incident happened
- Uses descriptive words to tell what was said (quotes)
- Done in a factual and nonjudgmental manner (journalistic approach)
- The use of direct quotes and descriptions of the child's expressions and gestures are important to include because they provide valuable information for review.
- Describe what was said and observed in a nonjudgmental and non-interpretive manner.

I highly recommend reviewing chapter 6, *Observing the Development of Individual Children by Using Anecdotal Records*, from the above-mentioned text for specific examples of both appropriate and inappropriate anecdotal records. However, the interpretations need to be expanded on. There is a copy on reserve in the Ohlone library, and couple available for check out.

Review the following websites for more information and examples of appropriately written anecdotal observations.

www.primarily-kids.com/anecdotal_record.html

www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/instrctn/in5lk37.htm

[www.aps.edu/aps/tlsmentor/FormsDocs/Educators%20Edge%20october%202007%20anecdotal%20records\(revised\).pdf](http://www.aps.edu/aps/tlsmentor/FormsDocs/Educators%20Edge%20october%202007%20anecdotal%20records(revised).pdf)

www.cpin.us/preschoolonline/train1syllabus.htm#week4

<http://it.coe.uga.edu/~treeves/edit8350/ARF.html>

www.fsu.edu/~flserve/resources/methods/ObservationsandChecklists_Part1.pdf

www.uft.org/chapter/teacher/special/anecdotal_recor/

www.teachersnetwork.org/NTNY/nychelp/need_to_know/anecreport.htm