

Respectful and Person-First Medical Summary Reports

Words are powerful, and the words we choose impact understanding, interpretation, and ultimately, the outcomes of disability applications. By carefully choosing our words, we convey respect for the applicant's experience and their intrinsic value as people first.

	Preferred	Discouraged
When referring to the applicant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John, John Smith, Mr. Smith • Participant <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with [diagnosis] <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person experiencing homelessness • Person who is unhoused <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Smith was formerly incarcerated • John is currently in custody/residing/incarcerated at Any County Jail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer, client, patient <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schizophrenic, antisocial, manic depressive <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless person <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offender, felon, (ex) convict, delinquent • Inmate
When discussing the applicant's experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant stated, shared • Use direct quotes <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the symptoms and resulting functional impairments that led to their current situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant claims, alleges <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing applicant's circumstances as a choice (i.e., chooses not to work; doesn't care about hygiene)
When describing the applicant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the symptoms that prevent taking medications or attending treatment <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple relationships or risky behaviors • Only include when relevant to symptoms and, if necessary, describe circumstances <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having difficulty coping • Exhibiting symptoms <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unproductive coping mechanisms; struggle to manage emotions effectively <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use descriptive and objective language to describe what the person looked like, what they were wearing, and the condition of their clothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-compliant <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promiscuous <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crazy/basket-case <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulative <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unkempt
When discussing substance use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not using drugs/alcohol, documented nonuse • Clear/negative toxicology reports <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented drug/alcohol use • Positive toxicology report • Describe substance use history in the context of how it relates to symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sober/clean <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Junkie, addict, meth user, dirty

Learn more about writing respectful, unbiased, and effective Medical Summary Reports:

[Sample Medical Summary Reports](#) • [SOAR Critical Component: The Medical Summary Report](#)

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