

Objective Documentation

Language guide for behavior records

classroompulse.io

Why Objectivity Matters

Behavior documentation may be reviewed by parents, administrators, advocates, attorneys, and other professionals. Objective language protects students, staff, and ensures records are useful for intervention planning.

Subjective vs. Objective Language

Subjective (Avoid)	Objective (Use)
Was angry	Raised voice, clenched fists
Had a meltdown	Cried for 12 minutes, fell to floor
Was defiant	Said "no" when given direction
Acted out	Threw materials off desk
Was aggressive	Hit peer on arm with open hand
Seemed upset	Tearful, refused to make eye contact
Manipulative	Requested help from 3 different adults
Attention-seeking	Called out 5 times during instruction

Documentation Formula

What + When + Where + How Long + What Happened Next

Example: "At 10:15 AM during math, student left assigned seat and walked around the room for 3 minutes. When redirected, student returned to seat and began working."

Words to Avoid

- Always, never (rarely accurate)
- Emotional labels (angry, happy, sad)
- Intent assumptions (wanted to, tried to, meant to)
- Character judgments (lazy, mean, difficult)
- Comparisons to other students
- Diagnostic language (unless formally diagnosed)

Words to Use

- Observable actions (said, walked, threw, hit)
- Specific counts and durations
- Direct quotes when relevant
- Descriptions of physical behaviors

- Time and location specifics
- Adult responses and outcomes

Practice Examples

Rewrite these subjectively worded notes:

"Student had a terrible day and was very aggressive toward everyone."

Better:

"Student was clearly trying to get attention and manipulate the teacher."

Better:

Pro Tip

When in doubt, ask yourself: "Could a video camera capture this?" If not, make it more specific and observable.

Built-in Objectivity

Classroom Pulse prompts for observable, measurable data and generates objective documentation automatically.

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