

Reviews

Effective Writing Skills for Social Work Students

Philip Musson

Exeter, Learning Matters, 2011, 88pp.

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Philip Musson has produced a practical guide to support social work students in developing their writing skills. In chapter one Musson provides clear guidance on writing skills. The chapter is extremely practical, filled with basic advice such as sentence construction, punctuation, spelling and uses of paragraphs. There is also brief guidance on gathering sources. This chapter would be useful to any social work student who is lacking in confidence as an academic writer. However, it perhaps could be developed further by placing greater importance on starting with the background reading offered by the programme or module reading list, as a first step. The student might be usefully equipped with exciting new knowledge and ideas to write about. More importantly, students who follow this advice could be exposed to a variety of academic writing which would feed into developing their own writing style. The chapter could also be improved by including a section giving advice on overall essay writing processes including the use of background reading, taking notes, skills on essay planning, thinking time, the essay writing itself and finally the editing. It is perhaps guidance on this overall process and the integral steps within it that develops better writing skills.

Musson concentrates chapter two on advice about what the student should expect on the placement as a part of the social work course. Musson usefully describes the National Occupational Standards and the Value Requirements at the core within the placement assessment. The chapter is useful for clear guidance on placement choice, placement location, dress code, professional boundaries, who's who on placement

and the different meetings one may attend. This information is, for obvious reasons, more useful for a new pre-qualifying student unfamiliar with social work settings rather than post qualifying students already established within their professional arena. Whilst this is useful and practical guidance, it is not entirely clear how it develops effective writing skills.

In chapter three Musson concentrates on developing effective writing skills specifically for placement assignments. Musson helpfully describes the different types of evidence collected by the student while on placement. The case studies (pp 44-46) are useful to illustrate how a student has obtained a particular National Occupational Standard within their writing. The chapter also gives guidance on preparing for observations and obtaining feedback from service users which is helpful but doesn't support development of effective writing skills connected to these tasks. Further within the chapter, the sections which give guidance on writing from a critical perspective and using theoretical frameworks within practice were helpful. Models of good pieces of writing to illustrate these sections perhaps could have been added. The section giving advice on reflective writing and being a reflective practitioner explained the process simply and could act as a useful starting point for student thinking.

Effective Writing Skills for Social Work students is written in an accessible and supportive style. It gives basic advice on developing effective writing skills for academic writing. It also gives guidance on the daunting world of student placements with advice on writing skills for placement assignments. However, the majority of writing which is assessed for social work university courses is arguably on the academic essay side rather than the placement assignment. The devotion of two of the three chapters on the placement experience would seem in this way to be wrongly balanced. Nevertheless, this book has a lot to offer for the student who is finding challenges in the construction of lucid and successful written arguments - perhaps returning to writing as a mature student, in connection with their course and placement in particular.

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