

A Case Study Approach to Writing Individualized Special Education Documents: From Preschool to Graduation



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Introduction

A Case Study Approach to Writing Individualized Special Education Documents: From Preschool to Graduation will follow one child, Rochelle, throughout her life in special education. For each primary special education document, you will be given a glimpse into Rochelle's life and needs. Given this information, you can then complete the relevant paperwork.

Case studies are inherently difficult to use to write a good special education document. There are inevitably questions that you will have which will not be directly answered in the case study. Never fear! It is often that way in real life, and we as teachers are called upon to use our best professional judgment and data to provide a solid plan for our students. For this reason, some readers may want to work with others, in a group setting, to discuss all the considerations and obtain other perspectives. Preparing for the Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting is supposed to be a multi-disciplinary approach, so working in groups is not only helpful, but more realistic. However, you may be the primary person responsible for drafting special education documents in your school. If that is the case, continue through this work alone. You can always ask a colleague for an opinion as you go along.

Children with disabilities often present numerous challenges throughout their educational careers. As they grow and develop and as their lives change, their response to educational stimuli also changes. Special education documents such as IFSPs and IEPs are designed to help service providers clearly describe the services being provided to the child with disabilities. However, these documents are challenging to complete and can be intimidating with all the legal ramifications. We often know what we want to say but writing it clearly on paper while adhering to a technical and lengthy form can be difficult.

Both authors have been teachers who wrote special education documents and professors who have trained pre-service educators to write them. As a result, they know how challenging the process can be. Finding relevant data and information to practice technical writing – as well as developing a quality case study – can be time-consuming, thus we created this case study. We also realize that not all educator preparation programs have embedded field experiences where data can be collected. It is our hope that this book will provide you time to focus on the technical writing aspect of special education paperwork.

About the Authors

Kathleen A. Boothe, PhD, has served the special education community in several capacities. She has been a classroom teacher, a district level behavior specialist, and is currently Program Coordinator and Associate Professor of Special Education at Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SE). Dr. Boothe is currently a member of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and an active member of the CEC Teacher Education Division. She also serves on the board of the Oklahoma Council for Exceptional Children. Her research focuses on improving educator preparation programs, especially as it relates to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and classroom/behavior management. She presents at CEC Teacher Education Division conferences and has published in several journals such as the *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals*, *Preventing School Failure*, and *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*. She recently won a Faculty Senate Award from SE for Excellence in Scholarship. She loves to travel with her husband and scope out local craft breweries.

Andrea R. Hathcote, PhD, has been part of the special education community as a classroom teacher, administrator, professor, and most importantly, parent of children with special needs. She is currently a professor at Tyler Junior College (TJC) and a member of the Texas Community College Teachers Association. She served as Coordinator of TRIO Student Support Services, a federal grant-funded program providing guidance to first generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities. In that capacity, Dr. Hathcote was part of the team that wrote a successfully funded competitive Department of Education grant. Her research focus is creating undergraduate research opportunities for freshmen and sophomores within the Presidential Honors Program at TJC. Her work has been published in several journals, including *Preventing School Failure and Multicultural Learning & Teaching*. In 2013, Dr. Hathcote won the Susan Phillips Gorin Award from the Council for Exceptional Children. She is a wife and mother who enjoys traveling the world through the flavors of her kitchen.

CHAPTER 1

Fundamentals of the Book

We created this book to be flexible; it can be used in its entirety, in any order, or on a chapter-by-chapter basis. We did our best to keep the style of the chapters similar, so the reader knows what to expect and how to maneuver through the chapters. For this reason, you will see that each chapter is segmented into the following sections:

- A brief discussion of the relevant content which includes the definition, purpose, and necessary legal components
- Background information and data to write the special education documents
 - Case Study
 - Perspectives from involved stakeholders
 - Assessment results to include data information about academics, behavior, and physical needs, as needed
- A “*Your Task*” section, providing guidance for beginning the writing process

Tips and Ideas for College Instructors and Professional Development Leaders

As mentioned earlier, you may use the contents of this book in any order. Each chapter’s case study and stakeholder perspectives will provide the information needed to complete the chapter’s specific special education documents. This book was designed to be used as a supplemental text to provide case study data and an overview of the relevant special education paperwork.

We included two symbols to represent areas of discussion. The light bulb will contain “Question(s) to Consider” about the section. We encourage you to use these discussion questions to help your students/trainees think about relevant aspects of the content. From our experience, we understand it is sometimes difficult to think of questions on the fly. The star signifies “Topic(s) for Discussion.” These topics are related to special education issues and can be used to connect the case study to your course content. We hope you will find these a beneficial piece of the book.

Resources for more information on the topic are also included in each chapter. These resources have been used in our professional experience and provided

CHAPTER 2

Factors to Consider When Writing Individualized Special Education Documents

Throughout this book, you will gain insight into Rochelle, a product of the foster care system. In chapter 3, you will find Rochelle entered the foster care system under weight and under height, and her speech was unclear. She was not potty trained and had occasional temper tantrums and outbursts. Rochelle had no educational experiences; she had never seen a book or discussed numbers. The first time she rode in a car was when she was removed from her biological parents by the social worker. She lived in a world that was isolated from civilization. As a result, she began her journey intellectually, developmentally, and physically delayed. From this beginning, the case study will take the reader through Rochelle's life through high school. Throughout the chapters you will also be introduced to Rochelle's:

- **Brother (Randall):** Randall is Rochelle's older brother. He is also under weight and under height, nor can he speak clearly.
- **First Foster Placement (Beverly and Art):** Beverly and Art have successfully fostered several children over the years. They are well respected by the Department of Family Services, and Beverly occasionally leads a support group for other foster parents.
- **Second Foster Placement (Aisha, DeMarcas and Andre):** Aisha and DeMarcas are the second foster parents with whom Rochelle will live. Andre is their teenage son. They are religious, community-minded, and very loving. DeMarcas is involved in a mentorship program based at the school. Aisha works full time at the church where DeMarcas is the minister.
- **Social Worker (Amanda):** Amanda has been a social worker for 17 years with the Department of Protective and Family Services. She says the case of Randall and Rochelle is one of the most severe examples of neglect she has ever seen. She fights to keep Randall and Rochelle as her "kids" throughout their time in foster care. She truly wants them to succeed.
- **Boyfriend (Xavier):** In middle school, Rochelle begins a relationship with a boy she meets at church. He participates in DeMarcas' mentorship program and comes from a very troubled background.

CHAPTER 3

Rochelle Qualifies for Early Intervention Services: Writing an Individualized Family Service Plan

This chapter begins with Rochelle entering a Head Start program and will review the components of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). At the end of the chapter, you will have an opportunity to practice using the information you have learned to write an IFSP for Rochelle. As you consider IFSPs, keep these questions in mind:

- What is the purpose of an IFSP?
- What is the role of the family in developing an IFSP?
- Who are the members of the multidisciplinary team?

Discussion of Individualized Family Service Plans

Individualized Family Service Plans are required by the Individuals with Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) Part C for babies and toddlers, birth to three years of age, and their families. The IFSP is the first support plan that babies and toddlers with special needs receive when eligible for early intervention services. The major difference between the IFSP and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is that IFSPs are focused on the family, whereas the IEP is focused on the individual student. Another difference is that the services from the IFSP usually take place in a child's natural setting, most likely the child's home (Stuart, n.d.).

Definition

Under Part C of IDEIA (2004), babies and toddlers are eligible for early intervention services. The specifics regarding these services can be found in the IFSP. IDEIA does not provide a specific definition for IFSPs, but it does note the required components, which we will discuss later in this chapter. According to Bruder (2000), the IFSP is the guide for early intervention services for both the child and their family. The purpose of the IFSP is to plan, implement, and evaluate early intervention services that are specific to the child's and family's needs.

CHAPTER 4

Rochelle Goes to Elementary School: Writing an Individualized Education Program

In this chapter, you will learn more about the required components of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and explore Rochelle's need for an IEP as she transitions to elementary school. After reading the required IEP components, a case study and data will be provided for you to practice, using your state or district form. As you consider IEPs, keep these questions in mind:

- What is the purpose of an IEP?
- What are the criteria for writing quality goals and objectives?
- Who are the members of the multidisciplinary team?

Discussion of Individualized Education Programs

An IEP is a legal requirement under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004. The IEP provides schools and families with information on the responsibilities of the school district in providing appropriate Special Education services to eligible students. Each IEP should be based on an individual student, and no two IEPs should look the same.

Definition

IEPs are required by federal law for all students identified with a disability through the IDEIA. Part B defines an IEP as "...a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting..." (IDEIA, 2004).

Multidisciplinary Team

IEPs are created by a multidisciplinary team made up of the following required persons:

- Parents
- Local Education Agency Representative (usually the building principal or assistant principal)

CHAPTER 5

Rochelle Needs Behavior Support: Writing Behavior Intervention Plans

This chapter provides a description of Rochelle's escalating behavior at school and a description of the components of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). Please note that states differ in their terminology so for this chapter, the BIP is the same thing as a Behavior Support Plan. After reading the required FBA and BIP components, a case study will be provided which can be used to write an FBA and/or BIP. As you consider BIPs, keep these questions in mind:

- What is the purpose of a BIP?
- What is a target behavior?
- What is the purpose of identifying the function of a student's behavior?

Discussion of Behavior Intervention Plans

This section provides background information on the parts of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) and will help in writing these documents for any student with an identified problem behavior. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; 2004) does not provide much guidance in the area of FBAs and BIPs. However, it does state that schools must address behavior concerns in a proactive manner and document the behavior in the IEP. FBAs and BIPs should be written by members of the IEP team who know the student. All team members should play an essential role in gathering data for the FBA and the BIP; however, the special education teacher or someone else well versed in behavior should take the lead.

Definition

IDEIA (2004) does not specifically define FBAs or BIPs in the mandates, but it emphasizes the importance of when to conduct an FBA and develop a BIP. IDEIA also discusses the requirement of students receiving a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and that they be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This is important to consider because behavior problems can lead

CHAPTER 6

Rochelle Plans for Graduation: Writing Transition Plans

This chapter concludes Rochelle’s case study by discussing her needs for successful high school completion, including post-secondary education and community support. In this chapter, you will read about the required components of the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) and explore Rochelle’s need for the ITP as she prepares for graduation. As you consider ITPs, keep these questions in mind:

- What is the purpose of an ITP?
- When are ITPs to be addressed in the IEP?
- What is the purpose of teaching self-determination skills to students?

Discussion of Transition Plans

This section provides the reader with information relevant to the ITP that will help you complete the transition plan for Rochelle. Transition services is a term commonly used when referring to ITPs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) states that transition services need to be addressed by the time a student turns 16 years of age. Many states encourage the discussion of transition to begin at age 14, if not earlier.

Definition

Transition services are specified in the IDEIA (2004). Transition services are activities which are results-oriented and are based on the individual needs of the child with a disability (IDEIA, 2004). Because schools are required to plan for the future of a student with disabilities, it must be included in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The transition plan will include goals for the student after high school, and the steps necessary in reaching those goals.

Purpose

According to IDEIA (2004), transition services must begin at, or before, age 16. Transition plans are part of a student’s IEP to ensure adequate skills for success