Writing skills for social workers (3rd ed.)

Social workers increasingly use technology to communicate. At times it can be difficult to adopt the right language or tone, to remain professional yet not alienate the audience you are trying to engage with. I'm a social worker in a health setting; I use a cell phone to text, speak directly and send emails. I use a computer to access and contribute to databases, type case notes, write formal statements; I have a tablet which enables me to work away from my desk. I contribute to a blog, I occasionally tweet and use and access social media platforms. All of the above tools have sometimes unspoken rules; it can be difficult to confidently and professionally navigate between the different platforms.

This is the third edition of Karen Healy and Joan Mulholland's book, *Writing Skills for Social Workers*. The authors continue to emphasise the importance of a contextual approach to professional writing for social workers with added information on adapting and integrating Information & Communications Technology (ICT) to the many forms of writing undertaken by social work practitioners.

Both authors have published extensively. Professor Karen Healy is a social work educator and researcher at the University of Queensland and has written extensively, including five social work books, numerous journal articles and also conducts professional writing workshops with social workers. Associate Professor Joan Mulholland is an Honorary Researcher at the School of Communication and Arts at the University of Queensland. She has published widely on language skills in business health and social work and how "persuasive tactics" can help practitioners achieve their goals.

The book is divided into four parts, further divided by chapters. The layout is clear and easy to follow.

Part I introduces the fundamental aspects of writing with particular attention to the differences between spoken and written communication. The second chapter focuses on the skills needed to manage the information flow provided by ICT. The idea of developing your own system to manage ICT that is personalised to your own individual context or situation is one I will definitely adopt.

Part II focuses on writing skills in daily practice beginning with emailing, texting, messaging and letters. I found it interesting that the authors paired these increasingly common daily (often short) forms of communication with the usually more formal structure of a written letter. Clarity was provided as I read the chapter; for learning more effective methods of structuring a formal letter I could use both forms of communication: for example, the attachment of a formal letter to an email to better convey my intent and purpose. Chapter 4 reminds us that our case notes will exist for a very long time as well as alerting us to the notion of "of the influence of ICT on the standardization of social work writing processes and how social workers may address some of the constraining aspects of these changes so as to highlight the client's voice and the social work contribution to the matters recorded" (p.xiii).

Part III takes a macro view by looking at the writing skills used to obtain resources and to create change. How to access and how to enhance accessibility specifically by making use of media is examined. Social media platforms as a form of creating a presence, or a means of getting your message to a wider audience, are discussed; also included are the pitfalls and what to do about them.

Policy and social work often go hand in hand. Policy influences how and what we can do in aspects of practice—social workers, in turn, can influence policy. The second part of Part 3 looks at writing policy proposals. I found this chapter a useful reminder of the policy process and the role of social work in relation to policy.

The final part of the book, Part IV, looks at the writing skills needed by social workers to influence their professional context. Part IV is divided into three chapters: the first discusses the literature review, in particular, looking at how ICT can aid this process. Chapter 11 looks at ways social workers can contribute to the formal social work knowledge base. It covers the where, how, and why aspects of writing journal articles

and conference papers. Chapter 12 concludes the book with a discussion on professional writing now and into the future.

I really liked the notion (delivered at the start of the book) that writing is a skill that can be learned. Throughout the book, at the end of each chapter, there are exercises provided as well as further reading suggestions that reinforce the concept that writing can be learned.

My copy of this book is already well thumbed. It could be useful to have this book published as two separate publications: a general writing skills book, and a separate volume for the more specific chapters on writing for specific purposes.

Overall, I found this book really relevant to my daily practice. The recurring theme of the importance of a contextual professional approach to writing for social workers sits well within the ethical base of social work. The practical suggestions and ideas for managing ICT to communicate across different platforms are accessible and easy to implement. I feel this book is a useful "go to" guide for social workers who wish to improve their writing skills.

Reviewed by **Nicola Cabell**, Clinical Social Worker, Canterbury District Health Board