AIFreeForever

The Progress Note Guide for 2026

A progress note records what happened in a session, what you did, how the client responded and what comes next. This guide shows the four common formats side by side, the wording that keeps a note objective, what to leave out for privacy, and what to check before you file a note, by hand or with AI.

The four formats side by side

Format	Sections	Best for
SOAP	Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan	Medical, therapy and general clinical notes
DAP	Data, Assessment, Plan	Mental health, counseling and social work
BIRP	Behavior, Intervention, Response, Plan	Behavioral work and skills training
Narrative	Short paragraphs in time order	Education and case management

One detail, objective and not

Opinion (avoid)

The client was being difficult and clearly did not want to be there.

Objective (use)

The client arrived 15 minutes late, answered in short sentences and declined the homework review.

Write a note in four steps

1. **Write it soon.** Notes written the same day are more accurate. Jot the key points before the next session.
2. **Separate what was said from what you saw.** Client statements go in Subjective or Data; your observations go in Objective.
3. **Assess only what the facts support.** Link your assessment to what happened in the session and to the client's goals.
4. **End with a clear plan.** Homework, follow-up, referrals and the focus of the

Keep it private

1. **Use initials only.** Never type a client's name into an AI tool, and leave out dates of birth, addresses, phone numbers and record numbers.
2. **Describe, do not identify.** "Client discussed stress at work" is enough; the employer's name is not needed.
3. **Know your rules.** A free AI tool is not a HIPAA-compliant system. Follow your organization's policy on what may be entered where.

Using AI to draft a note

1. **Give the facts, not the conclusions.** The AI writes only from what you give it; anything missing comes back as [to add].
2. **Fill in every [to add].** Use your own records, never a guess.
3. **Read it as the professional.** Remove anything that did not happen and correct any wording before it goes in a record.

Words that keep a note objective

Instead of	Write
"seemed angry"	"raised voice, arms crossed, said he was frustrated"
"did well"	"completed 3 of 4 homework tasks"
"unmotivated"	"declined the exercise twice"

Check before you file it

Write a draft with the free Progress Note Generator, then tick these off.

Is every detail something that really happened in the session?

Are all [to add] parts filled in, with no names or identifying details?

Does the plan say what happens next, and does the note follow your organization's standards?

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