

The SOAP note tax.

Payers ask for three things. Why are we writing four sections and a short story?



WHAT'S ASKED VS. WHAT WE WRITE

Payers ask for three things.

WHAT PAYERS WANT

- 1 Billable skill targets
- 2 Client performance
- 3 Skilled intervention

WHAT WE HAND THEM

- Subjective
- Objective
- Assessment
- Plan

Nobody asked for the acronym. We inherited it.

EXHIBIT A

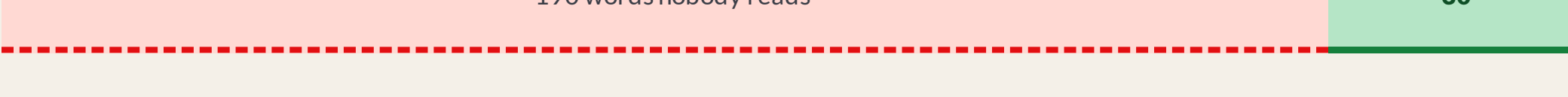
A "great" SOAP note. Thorough. Contextual. Compliant with itself.

Shaded green is what the payer needs. Shaded red is everything else.

S	Caden arrived on time with Mom, wearing his blue dinosaur shirt and light-up sneakers. Mom reports a good weekend and a trip to the zoo with cousins. He was slightly tired after a late bedtime but happy to come in. Mom denies new concerns. He separated easily and ran to the therapy room.	Cut: arrival, outfit, weekend recap. No payer scores any of it.
O	Session opened with a game of Candy Land to build rapport and establish engagement. Caden was then seated at the table for structured articulation tasks. Targeting initial /k/ in words, Caden produced 14/20 (70%) accurately with minimal verbal cues. Targeting initial /g/ in words, he produced 9/20 (45%) with moderate cues. Clinician provided phonetic placement cues and faded to verbal models as accuracy improved. Caden tolerated the tasks well and stayed in his seat for most of the session. Stickers were used for reinforcement.	Cut: game narration, seating, stickers. The data is buried mid-paragraph.
A	Caden is a pleasant and motivated 4-year-old who continues to present with a moderate phonological disorder impacting speech intelligibility. He demonstrated good progress this session and responded well to cueing. Skilled intervention remains necessary to address deficits and to improve functional communication.	Cut: restates the evaluation. "Good progress" has no number behind it.
P	Continue plan of care once weekly. Will continue targeting /k/ and /g/ in initial position and advance to medial position when accuracy reaches 80%. Home practice sheet provided to Mom. Next session may include a new game.	Cut: already in the plan of care and goals.

THE MATH

About 220 words written. About 30 needed.



Word counts are approximate, taken from the sample note above.

THE MATH, PER SESSION

WRITE THE FULL SOAP NOTE

5–10 min

Per session, per kid.

WRITE WHAT'S NEEDED

<1 min

Same compliance. Same billing support.

Minutes of unpaid prose, every session, every day.

EXHIBIT B

The same session, the way a payer reads it.

TARGETS	Initial /k/ and /g/ in words
PERFORMANCE	/k/ 14/20 (70%), minimal verbal cues /g/ 9/20 (45%), moderate cues
SKILLED INTERVENTION	Phonetic placement cues, faded to verbal models

Date • 30 min • 92507 • Signature, CCC-SLP

Same data. Scannable in seconds, auditable in a column, and it can feed a progress graph without anyone re-reading prose.

WHAT THE GUIDANCE SAYS

None of them require SOAP.

CMS MEDICARE BENEFIT POLICY MANUAL, CH. 15, §220.3 Lists required elements. Names no format. Each treatment note needs the date, each billed intervention in language you can match to the claim, timed-code and total treatment minutes, and signature with credentials. It names no format, and says the treatment note need not argue medical necessity.	ASHA DOCUMENTATION IN HEALTH CARE Prescribes no format. SOAP is "commonly used." States that it does not prescribe a specific format, on paper or electronic. SOAP is described only as commonly used. ASHA's school FAQ asks for service provided and student performance.	AOTA GUIDELINES FOR DOCUMENTATION OF OT (2018) "Commonly used." Types can be combined and reorganized. Calls SOAP commonly used, which is a description, not a mandate. It says documentation types can be combined and reorganized to fit the setting, and defers to payer and facility requirements.
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"Commonly used" quietly became "required" through habit.

THE REAL COST OF THE FLUFF

Format isn't free.

Time Minutes of unpaid prose, every session, every day.	Progress Data trapped in sentences can't be graphed or compared.	Audits Reviewers dig the targets and scores out of free text.
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Target.
Performance.
Skilled intervention.

That's it.

