

The 5-Minute Progress Note

A four-line formula that holds up under audit, reads back clearly months later, and gets you out the door on time.

THE FORMULA

Four lines are enough

LINE	WHAT GOES IN IT	ASK YOURSELF
T • Target	The symptom, problem or goal you worked on, in the words of the treatment plan.	Which goal did today serve?
I • Intervention	What <i>you</i> did, starting with a clinical verb a reviewer recognizes.	What would someone have seen me do?
R • Response	What the client did with it: observable behavior, their own words, a rating if you took one.	How do I know it landed, or didn't?
P • Plan	What happens next: homework, next session's focus, anything you're monitoring, including risk.	What would a covering clinician need to know?

WHY IT WORKS

Each line links back to the treatment plan and forward to the next session. That link between diagnosis, plan and note is what reviewers call the golden thread, and it is what makes a note defensible.

FILL-IN TEMPLATE

Copy this into your EHR

T: Addressed treatment goal _____ (e.g., reduce frequency of panic episodes).

I: Clinician _____ (verb) _____ (skill or technique) to _____ (purpose).

R: Client _____ (observable response). Client stated, "_____" Rated ____/10 before, ____/10 after.

P: Client will _____ before next session. Next session: _____. Risk: _____ (denied SI/HI / screened, see assessment).

WORKED EXAMPLE

What it looks like finished

T: Addressed Goal 1, reduce avoidance of work meetings related to generalized anxiety.

I: Clinician reviewed the anxiety log, used cognitive restructuring to examine the prediction “I’ll freeze and everyone will notice,” and rehearsed a 60-second opening statement.

R: Client identified two prior meetings that went better than predicted and practiced the statement twice with steadier voice. Rated anticipatory anxiety 8/10 at start, 5/10 after rehearsal.

P: Client will attend Tuesday’s team meeting and log anxiety before and after. Next session: review log and grade the next exposure. Denied SI/HI.

INSTEAD OF / WRITE

Swap vague for specific

INSTEAD OF	WRITE
Client was resistant.	Client declined the exposure task; identified fear of losing control as the barrier.
Client was noncompliant.	Client did not complete the sleep log; reported working double shifts this week.
Discussed feelings.	Explored grief related to father’s death using an empty-chair exercise.
Client seemed fine.	Euthymic, full range of affect, engaged throughout; denied SI/HI.
Provided support.	Validated client’s frustration with the diagnosis and normalized adjustment responses.

INTERVENTION VERBS

Assessed · Reviewed · Explored · Processed · Challenged · Reframed · Modeled · Rehearsed · Role-played · Taught · Practiced · Validated · Normalized · Summarized · Collaborated on · Developed · Monitored · Screened · Referred · Coordinated with

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