

10 Criteria for Writing a Social Story

(Gray, Carol. 2015. The new social story book: Revised and expanded 15th anniversary edition. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons.)

1. **The Goal:** “The goal of a social story is to share accurate information using a content, format, and voice that is descriptive, meaningful, and physically, socially, and emotionally safe for the intended Audience.”
 - a. Every Social Story displays a respect for its Audience, regardless of the topic.
 - b. The safety of a Story is an Author’s first concern.
2. **Two-Step Discovery:** “Keeping the goal in mind, Authors gather relevant information to 1) improve their understanding of the Audience in relation to a situation, skill, or concept, and/or 2) identify the specific topic(s) and type(s) of information to share in the Story.”
 - a. Authors consider how a situation may look, feel, smell, or sound like to the Audience, or how a concept may be perceived, understood, or processed.
 - b. It is important to gather information before deciding on a specific topic.
 - c. Gathering information prior to deciding on a topic saves the Author time and the Audience frustration.
 - d. 50% of all Social Stories must applaud what the Audience is doing well.
 - e. *Get this right and the Story will almost write itself.*
3. **Three Parts and a Title:** “A Social Story/Article has a title and introduction that clearly identifies the topic, a body that adds detail, and a conclusion that reinforces and summarizes the information.”
 - a. Writing with the introduction, body, and conclusion in mind helps Authors efficiently identify (introduction), describe (body), and reinforce (conclusion) the most important concepts in a Social Story.
 - b. Introduction: Clearly state the topic
 - c. Body: Adds further description and/or explanation
 - d. Conclusion: Refers back to the concepts, situations, and/or achievements that initiated the Story

4. **FOURmat Makes it Mine:** “The Social Story format is tailored to the individual abilities, attention span, learning style and – whenever possible – talents and/or interests of the Audience.
 - a. Individualized factors should be considered: length of the Story, sentence structure, vocabulary, font and font size, tailoring to Audience talents and/or interests, and organization of the text and illustration.
 - b. Format is developed from an understanding of the Audience, so that in turn it may help the Audience understand.
 - c. Consider the following: age & ability of the student, use rhythmic and repetitive phrases, incorporate the student’s talents and/or interests to hold attention, illustration refers to the use of visual arts to support the meaning of text.
5. **Five Factors Define Voice and Vocabulary:** “A Social Story has a patient and supportive voice and vocabulary that is defined by five factors. They are: (1) 1st or 3rd person perspective; (2) Positive & patient tone; (3) Past, present, or future tense; (4) Literally accurate; and (5) Accurate meaning.
 - a. Many Social Stories are written in a first person voice. Authors make sure not to “put words into the mouth” of the Audience or presume to make an uninformed guess regarding the Audience perspective.
 - b. A Social Story uses positive language.
 - c. Social Stories safeguard the self-esteem of the Audience.
 - d. Social Story Authors select words, phrases, and sentences that are accurate, even if interpreted literally.
 - e. Social Story Authors use the most efficient vocabulary possible by selecting words most likely to be clear messengers of their meaning.
6. **Six Questions Guide Story Development:** “A Social Story answers relevant “wh” questions, describing the context (where), time-related information (when), relevant people (who), important cues (what) basic activities, behaviors, or statements (how) and the reasons or rationale behind them (why).
 - a. The basic “wh” questions remind us to include basic information that we may otherwise take for granted.

7. **Seven is About Sentences:** “A Social Story is comprised of Descriptive Sentences, and may also have one or more Coaching Sentences. Sentences adhere to all applicable Social Story Criteria.
- a. Descriptive Sentences describe observable external factors, describe or refer to another person’s internal state, may be used to enhance the meaning of surrounding statements such as describing commonly shared beliefs, values, or traditions within a given culture.
 - b. Coaching Sentences gently guide behavior via descriptions of effective Team or Audience responses.
 - i. Describe expected or effective responses or possible choices
 - ii. Provide suggestions or reminders for caregivers
 - iii. May include self-coaching sentences such as: When the teacher says, “Eyes and ears at the front of the room,” I will try to remember that it means to listen to what the teacher says and watch what he is doing.

8. **A GR-EIGHT Formula:** “One Formula ensures that every Social Story describes more than directs.”

- a. The Social Story Formula:

$\frac{\text{DESCRIBE (Total number of Descriptive Sentences in the story)}}{\text{COACH (Total number of Sentences that Coach in the story)}} \geq 2$
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9. **Nine Makes it Mine:** “Every Social Story is reviewed and revised until it meets all applicable Social Story Criteria.”

10. **Ten Guides to Implementation:** “The 10 guides to implementation ensure that the philosophy and Criteria that guide Story development are consistent with how it is introduced and reviewed with the Audience.”

- a. 1) Plan for comprehension, 2) Plan story support, 3) Develop a story schedule, 4) Plan a positive introduction, 5) Monitor!, 6) Organize the stories, 7) Mix and match stories to build concepts, 8) Story reruns and sequels, 9) Recycle instruction into applause, 10) Stay current