

Thorough documentation is important in human resources management, and it can help you avoid possible lawsuits and prevail in cases that are tried in court. A primary purpose of personnel documents is to help persuade a third party such as a judge, jury, arbitrator, or mediator, that you made a reasonable and sound business decision based on the information available to you at the time. Your documents will be more credible and reliable if you use the following standard practice:

1. Date each document (include the day, month and year).
2. Clearly print the name of the person who prepares the document, include his or her title, and require that they sign the document.
3. If the referenced document refers to a meeting, list the names and job titles of attendees.
4. If the document is a disciplinary memo or performance evaluation, require the employee to sign it and include his or her written comments. If the employee refuses to sign the document, have the person who met with the employee put the statement "Employee refused to sign" on the document.
5. If the employee will not necessarily agree with the contents of the document, such as a disciplinary memorandum, include the statement, "My signature below indicates that I received this memorandum and that the contents of this memorandum has been discussed with me, not that I necessarily agree."
6. Cite the specific policy or procedure that is the subject of the document by its title and/or number.
7. Complete the document on or near the date of the referenced event(s).
8. Ensure that all facts stated are accurate. Expressing your personal opinions or beliefs is to be avoided. Do not exaggerate and do not include insignificant or petty facts.
9. Unless you can support accusations or conclusions with written documentation do not use them. Be sure to state the facts that support any conclusions or accusations you do use.
10. Avoid promises or guarantees unless there is to be a formal contract.
11. Be honest and unbiased, even if honesty is unflattering to the employee.
12. Ensure consistency with other documentation, policies and procedures and the employee's previous documentation.
13. Use concise language, proper grammar, accurate spelling and a format that creates a readable and professional appearance. Make sure the document is legible.

*Disclaimer:*

*The above information is a summary providing guidance on the key aspects of the law. Federal and state laws are more complex than presented here. This information is simplified for the sake of brevity and is not intended to be a substitute for legal advice. This information is provided with the understanding that (1) the author and publisher are not rendering legal advice and (2) this information is not a substitute for the advice of competent legal counsel. For more information, please contact a human resource professional or an employment law attorney.*