



WRITING A CASE CONCEPTUALIZATION

Case conceptualizations are not only a useful tool to learn new psychotherapeutic theories, they are critical in the work of psychologists and therapists. They are meant to answer the question, ***Given this theory, how do I understand the distress of the patient/client and how did I help?*** This resource is meant to help you write a case conceptualization by identifying the core elements of the paper and providing some questions to help guide your writing process.

If your professor has provided a template, use that and consider this a supplement. Your assignment might not need every element, but the more you include, the more thorough your conceptualization will be.

Core Elements

Overview of theory	
<i>Major points to address</i>	<i>Things you might include</i>
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Who developed it?◆ What population/problem was it created to address?◆ What are the underlying philosophies?
Central assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ What self-evident propositions/ideas are at the foundation of the theory?
Key terms and constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ What are the “technical terms” and how can you explain them to a layperson?
Definitions of psychopathology and health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ How does this theory describe a person’s distress?◆ How does it describe the epitome of health?
Mechanism of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ How does a person move from psychopathology to health?
Goal of psychotherapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ What does a therapist hope to accomplish with their work?



Role of therapist	◆ How does the therapist facilitate the patient's movement toward psychological health?
Case formulation	
<i>Major points to address</i>	<i>Things you might include</i>
Patient history	<p>The theory is influential here. For example, if you have chosen a psychodynamic theory, the developmental history will include attachment style.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Identifying characteristics (e.g., gender, race, SES, etc.)◆ Referral question, concerns, goals◆ Observations and mental status◆ History of the problem◆ Developmental history◆ Historical and current family and social functioning◆ Relevant medical history◆ Strengths and resources
Case conceptualization	<p>This is where your critical thinking skills come in. Given the theory you just described, how do you as the therapist understand the patient's distress? This is where you bring in the central assumptions, key terms/constructs, definitions of psychopathology and health you explained above and apply them directly to the patient's case.</p>
Implemented interventions	<p>Given the theory's mechanism of change, goal of psychotherapy, and therapist role, what occurred during the sessions that helped the patient move toward psychological health? Theories often have specific interventions associated with them. These interventions have been developed to harness the theory's mechanism of change and role of the therapist to achieve the psychotherapeutic goals.</p>



Things to Consider While Writing

Awareness of audience	<p>What knowledge will your audience have before reading your case conceptualization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Can you rattle off key terms because it is understood that your audience will be familiar with the jargon or will you need to define and explain everything?◆ In other words, what is “common knowledge?”
Integration of sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Will you be describing the theory from the texts written by the original theorists or will you extract from a more current synthesis of the theory and/or other secondary sources?◆ What is “common knowledge” for your audience? What requires citations?
Introduction	<p>How will you orient your reader to the contents of the paper?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ An abstract?◆ An introductory paragraph?◆ Multi-level headers?◆ Some combination of these?
Content development	<p>The purpose of the paper is to apply the theory to the case.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Are you using the language (e.g., key terms and constructs) of the theory?◆ Does your case conceptualization describe the patient’s distress in terms of the theory’s definition of psychopathology?◆ Do your interventions harness the theory’s mechanism of change?◆ During the therapy, did you accurately fulfill the role of therapist? If not, have you provided insight as to why not?

*By Teresa Hoffman, PsyD. Candidate
Peer Writing Consultant
Antioch Virtual Writing Center*