

# **Text Analysis as a Tool for Coordinated Community Response: Keeping Safety for Battered Women and their Children at the Center**

Ellen Pence and Jane M. Sadusky

Developed in partnership with the  
Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice

**Praxis International**  
*“Integrating Theory and Practice”*

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WRITTEN BY

Ellen Pence and Jane M. Sadusky

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# A Foundation for Text Analysis

Before we say anything much about text analysis, or even about how to use this guide, we want to help you construct a visual foundation. With this guiding framework in mind you will be well on your way to understanding text analysis as a tool for change in an interagency response to domestic violence. Return to this section as you read the guide and design and carry out your own text analysis project.

## Frame 1: Recognize the organizing and coordinating methods at work

Institutions use eight primary methods of organizing and coordinating practitioners to process cases. Texts influence each method and frame each worker's actions. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the methods and texts that organize a patrol officers' work.

### Try this:

- 1) Use Figure 1 as a model.
- 2) Using the worksheet in Figure 2, draw yourself in your job in the middle.
- 3) Think about a key task you do now or have done in the past that was part of processing a case.
- 4) For each of the eight methods, identify one or two texts that are used to organize how you accomplish that task. Your completed worksheet should look similar to Figure 1, adapted for your job.



Figure 1: Organizing and Coordinating a Patrol Officer's Work

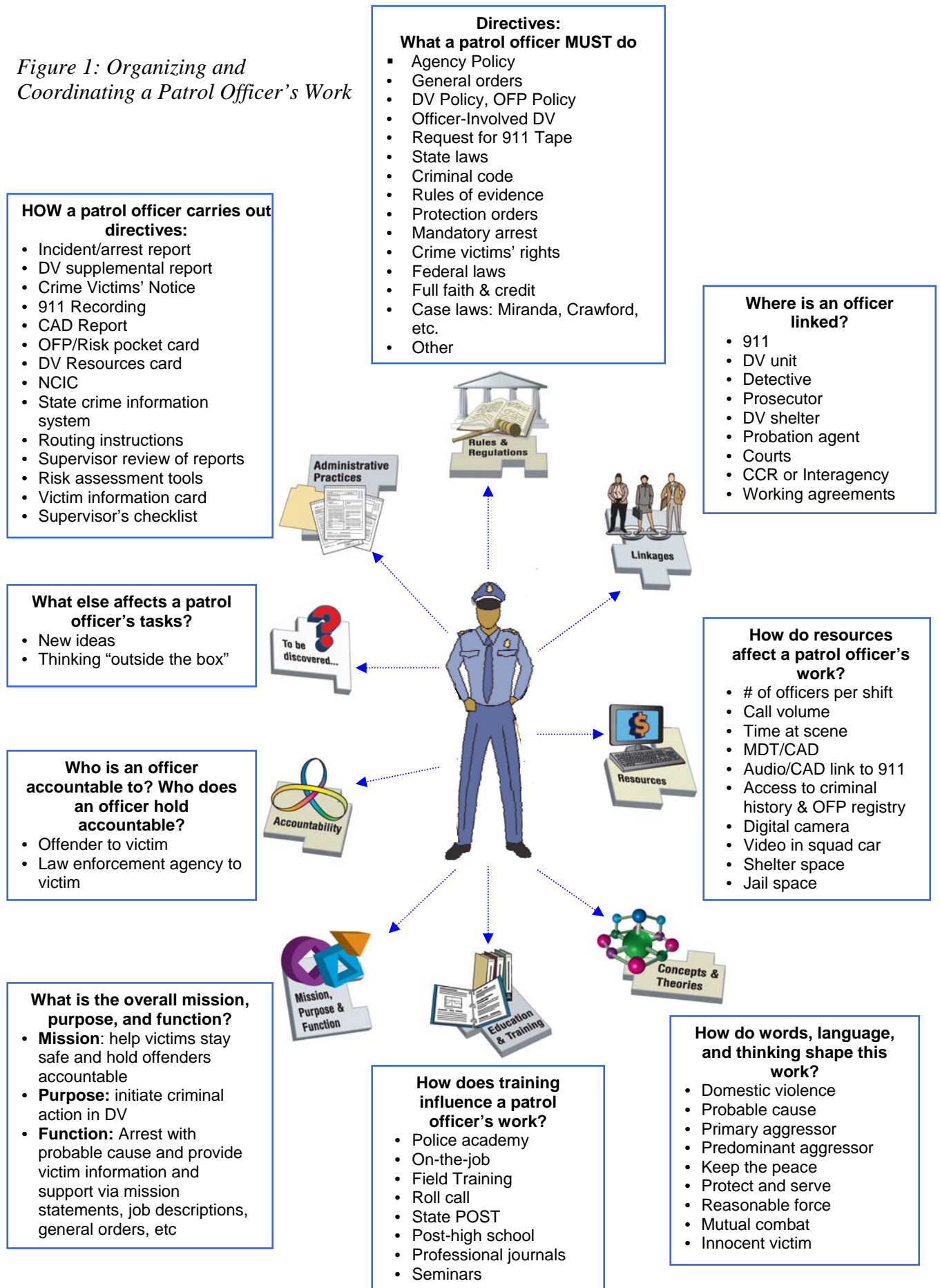
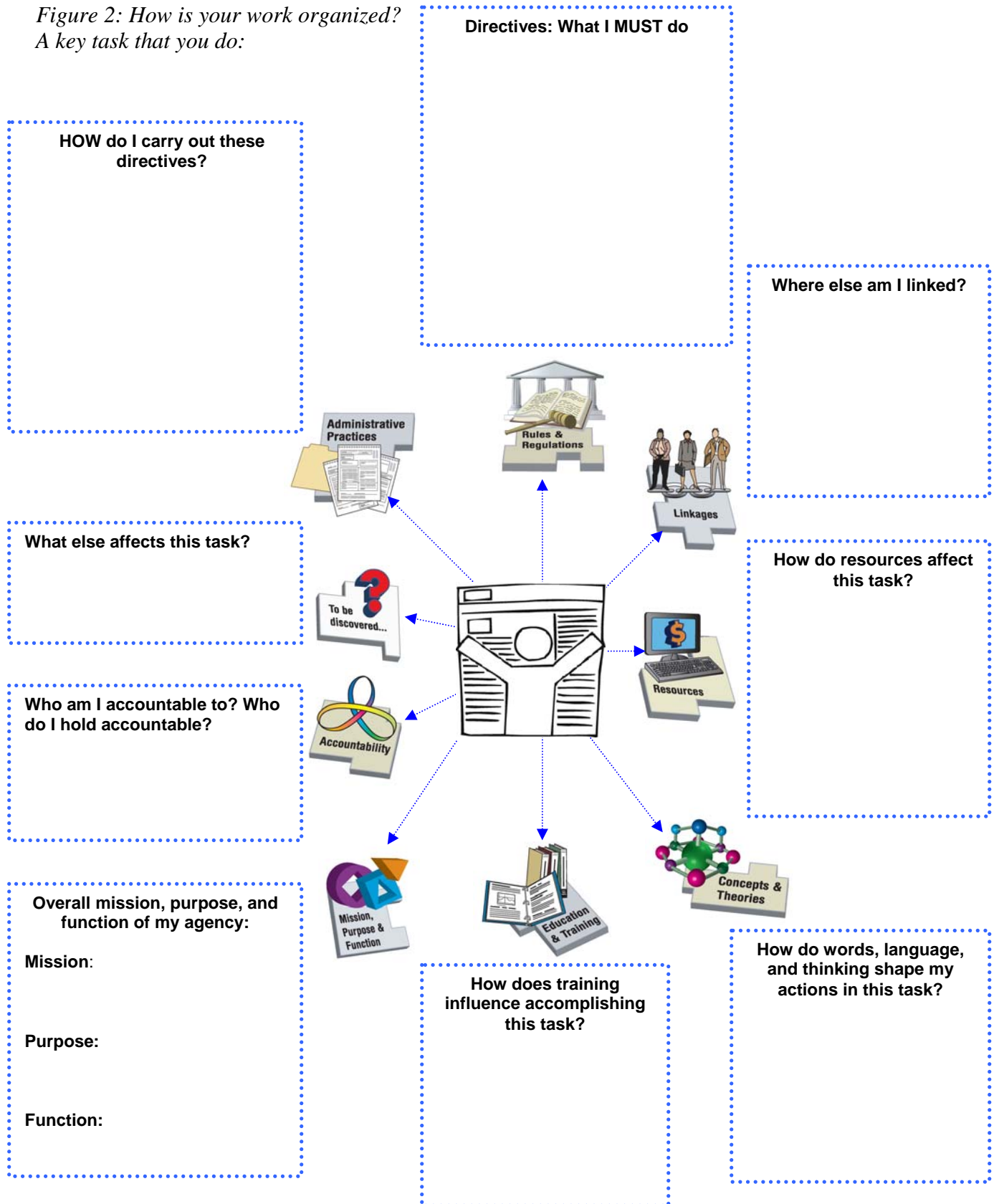


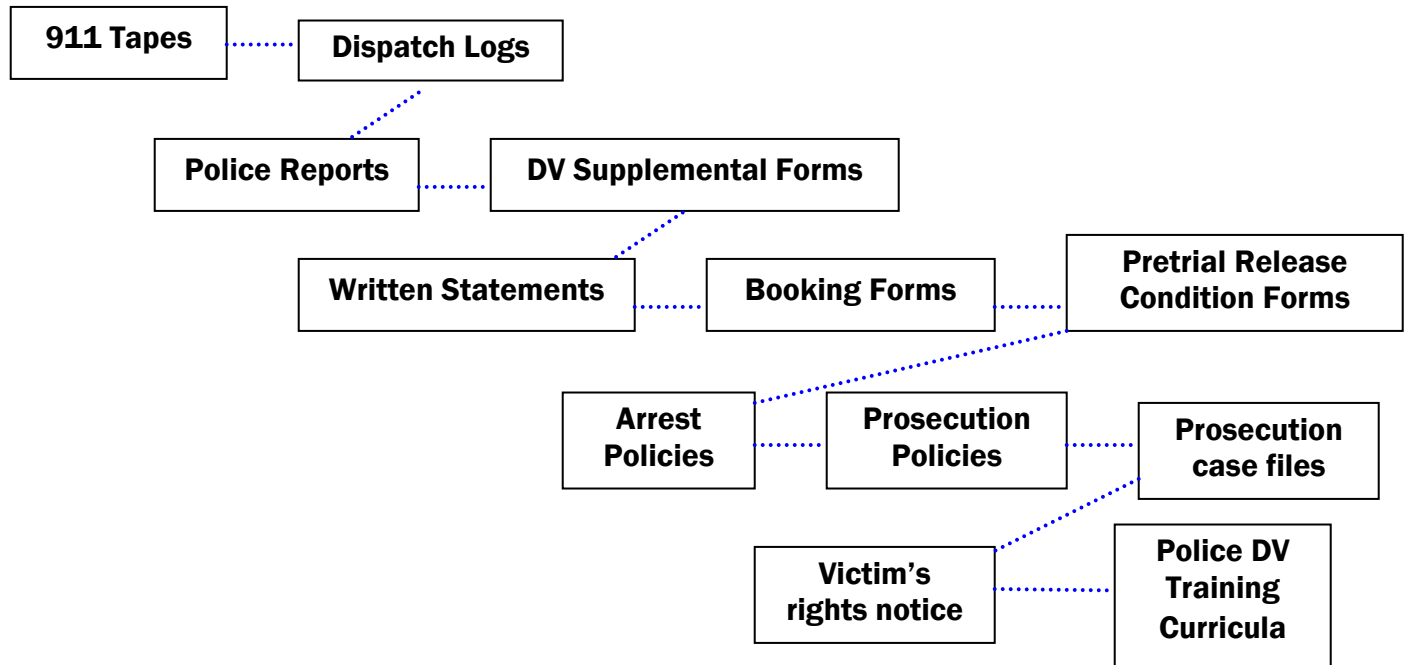
Figure 2: How is your work organized?  
A key task that you do:



## Frame 2: Understand how texts are constructed and used

In text analysis we want to learn how texts are put together and used, and with what effect on safety or another aspect of case processing that we are interested in, such as attention to children or accounting for aspects of culture. We want to identify the different kinds of texts involved and understand how they are made and used, and with what implications.

A text analysis of domestic assault case processing in the criminal legal system might include:



### Try this:

- 1) Find a text that you are familiar with in your role as a practitioner who is involved in some aspect of domestic violence case processing.
- 2) Answer the questions about how this text is constructed and used.

#### For any text, ask:

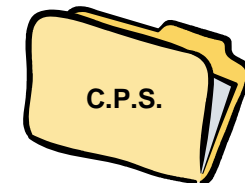
- ? At what point in case processing does it appear?
- ? Where did it come from?
- ? Where does it go from here?
- ? How is this text used? What does this worker do with it? Who reads it?
- ? How is it created? What had to happen to fill it out?
- ? What does this worker need to know in order to create it?
- ? How are rules and regulations written into this text?
- ? How are certain concepts or theories written in?
- ? How does it bring a victim of battering into some kind of official action?
- ? How might it produce a gap in safety or accountability?

### Frame 3: Understand the role that texts play in the relationship between a worker and the person who becomes an official “case”

Text analysis helps us see how texts both focus workers’ attention and stand in for limited aspects of someone’s life. It helps us identify the gaps between the realities of risk and safety for a victim of battering and the official response.

#### **Beth’s Story**

Yesterday the home pregnancy test was positive. Beth had been thinking again about filing for a divorce, but now she doesn’t know what to do. She’s been trying to set aside some money, but her car needs new brakes, and they just got a disconnect notice from the power company. Lenny got a lay-off notice from the school district in June, but they called him back two weeks ago when another teacher quit and he got their health insurance back. Beth works the front desk at the Holiday Inn, but keeps hearing rumors that it’s going to be sold. By fall she’d already used up all of her sick leave. She had to stay home once because she lost her voice after Lenny choked her; other times she just couldn’t get out of bed. Last week she got the first bad job review in her life. She’s worried about her daughter, Sara, who has serious asthma and has been staying in her room a lot. She misses her son, Kevin, who got a job in the Cities and hasn’t been home for months. He’s not calling like he used to, either. The phone rings and it’s her sister. She loves the prom dress that Beth made for her. They laugh when Beth says she might borrow it for her high school reunion. Beth thinks about telling her sister what’s going on, but Jeannie got mad when she changed her mind last year about leaving Lenny. She is sleeping when Lenny grabs her by the ankles, pulling her to the floor. She hits her head and tries to roll over as he kicks her in the ribs. He’s screaming at her: “I found that restraining order form. Go ahead, just try and leave. I’m not afraid of any restraining order.” Now he’s grabbed her hair and is pulling Beth to her feet, shaking her head back and forth. “Do you want to die, are you scared?” She hears knocking at the door. Ten year-old Sara has called the police. In this community, Child Protective Services is notified whenever a child is at the scene of a domestic abuse call.



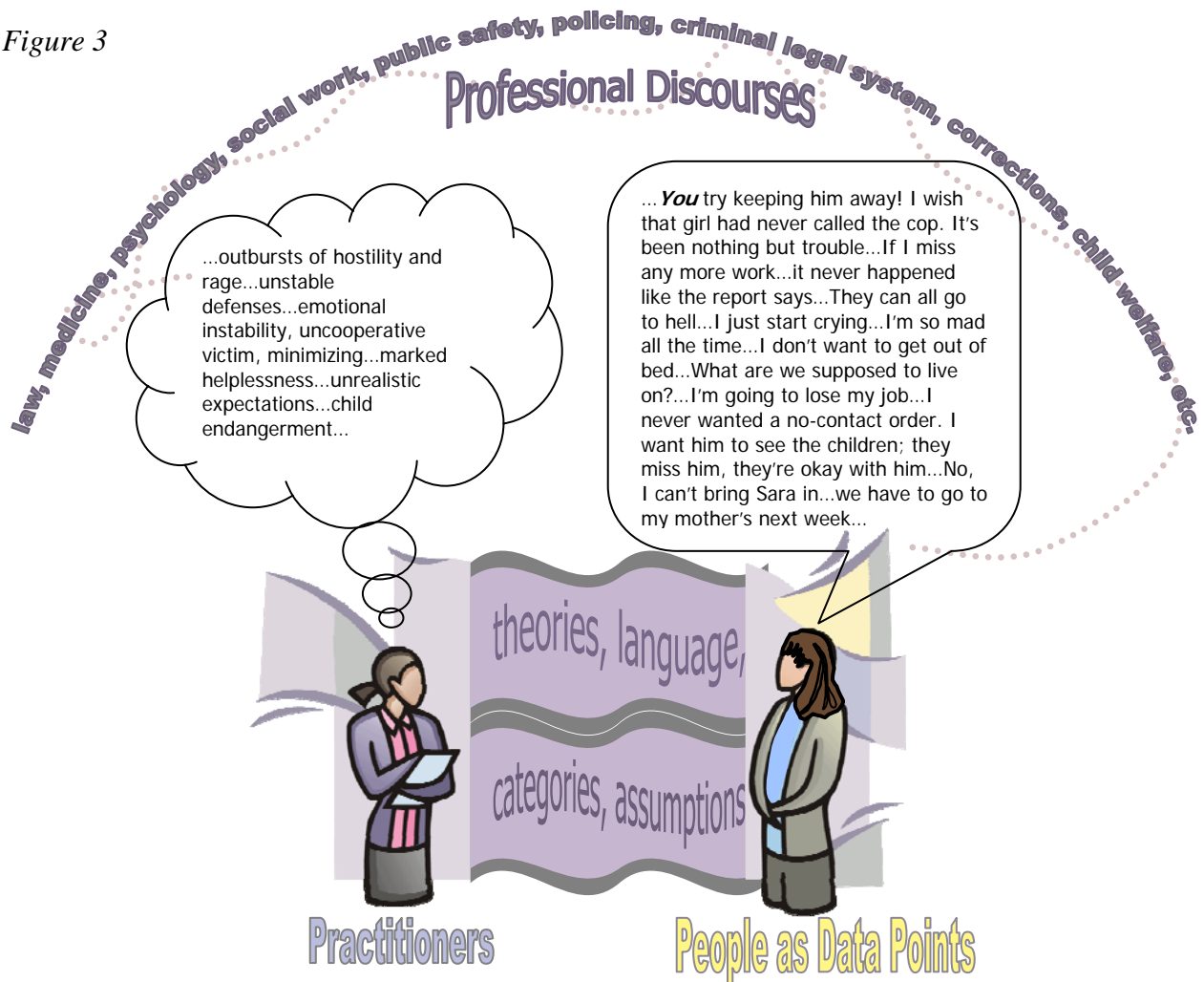
#### **Try this:**

- 1) Select a practitioner who will become involved in Beth’s case. It can be one of these or one you are more familiar with, such as a 911 operator or a community advocate.
- 2) List the kinds of forms, reports, computer screens, risk assessment tools, and other kinds of texts that the practitioner might use in processing Beth’s case.
- 3) What aspects of Beth’s life will matter to that text? What will get included? What will get left behind? How might Beth become an official police case or prosecution case or CPS case?
- 4) How might the text—e.g., an incident report form, prosecution case file, a CPS intake form, or a victim rights form—direct what the practitioner asks about? How might it direct the information the practitioner gathers?
- 5) What aspects of Beth’s life might be important to her safety and well-being, but will most likely get left out of any official text?

## Frame 4: Discover the concepts and theories operating in texts

Texts are constructed within theories, language, and categories. They carry assumptions about domestic violence, probable cause, predominant aggressor, best interests of the child, risk assessment. Concepts like failure to protect, parentification of children, parental alienation, and learned helplessness are all found within the professional “discourse” and buried in case processing texts. The “discourse” (i.e., the structure and language carried by disciplines such as social work, law, and psychology) directs how practitioners talk about and act on cases. Discourse shapes what practitioners ask about and collect in order to complete the text. People become data points and the interaction between practitioners and their clients is largely one-way, rather than a dialogue.

Figure 3



### Try this:

- 1) List 5 specialized terms that are specific to your profession and used when processing domestic abuse-related cases.
- 2) List 5 common texts that are specific to your role as a practitioner.
- 3) What concepts and theories can you identify in your work?
- 4) What professional discipline(s) is involved?

# How to use this guide

This guide assumes that someone from the advocacy field has been assigned the task of managing a text analysis project as part of a coordinated community response. It has been written to assist that person in identifying, gathering, and analyzing text with an interagency work group. It is not intended for general distribution, but contains templates that the coordinator can adapt and provide to those involved in a text analysis project.

You—the text analysis project coordinator—will find information in the guide about locating text, securing agreements, addressing confidentiality issues, analyzing various types of text, and managing the information your team collects and analyzes. You will find exercises to help you become more familiar with text analysis techniques.

We had many discussions about how complicated or how simple to make this guide. We did not want the reader to think, “Oh, my! Do I have to do all of that just to incorporate text analysis into our CCR work?” The answer is no. But we decided to present a full picture of how far a team could go with text analysis.

Start with the basics; keep it simple. As your coordinated response and interagency work advances you will find you are able to do more in-depth analysis. We went for more, not less; but hang in there! We are confident that once you introduce this approach into your interagency work you will find yourselves returning to it over and over again.

The ideas and processes presented in the guide are drawn in part from our experience with the Praxis Domestic Violence Safety and Accountability Audit. While conducting a text review of CCR-related forms, files, and procedures does not depend on completing an audit, it would be helpful to be familiar with audit concepts and methods, as presented in *The Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit Tool Kit*.<sup>1</sup> In a Safety Audit, for example, text analysis is interwoven with interviews and observations in order to provide a multi-dimensional picture of what is happening to whom, and with what implications for safety and accountability. While texts speak volumes about how work is organized, text analysis alone does not tell us how a problem is produced. You will find that as you analyze texts you will need to talk with those who use and produce them in order to get a full picture of how to use this information to improve interventions. Reading the texts will lead to questions the case file or other text alone cannot answer, such as:

- How does the police department policy on “verbal domestics” (or other aspects of the policy) influence how the dispatcher just handled this call?
- How are dispatchers instructed to use the various codes to prioritize calls?
- What factors are police supposed to consider when determining who the predominant aggressor is?
- How does the form used to document supervised visits limit what the visitation monitor records, even though s/he thinks it would be important for the court to know other information about the case?
- How do risk scales help or hinder a child protection worker in providing helpful services to the family members involved in a CPS (child protective services) case?
- How might these scales contribute to racial disparity in who is placed in foster care?

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<sup>1</sup>Available from Praxis International, Inc., 5402 North Shore Drive, Duluth, MN 55804; (218) 525-0487; [www.praxisinternational.org](http://www.praxisinternational.org).

- How does the jailer’s notification to victims when a violent inmate is released contribute to victim safety?

Many of these questions can be answered by the expertise you already have on your CCR team. When you are unable to answer the questions that reading inevitably prompts, bring those who have that expertise into your meetings or go and speak with them.

As you and your team read, question, and analyze case files or other texts, keep the following questions in mind.

- How does this text organize and coordinate workers to act? Keep the graphic below in mind as you ask this question.

*Figure 4*



- What concepts, language, and assumptions are embedded in the texts? How are workers being directed to use certain concepts and theories in handling the case?
- What is the text doing? For example, does it screen, prioritize, define, direct resources, evaluate, or link practitioners?
- How do the person and his or her experience get translated onto paper? What is the institutional version of what is going on? Is anything important to that person’s experience or safety missing, made invisible, marginalized, or distorted? Where and how does the text show us a gap between what people need and what the institution or worker is providing?
- How do we see safety in this case? In this record? Remember the different dimensions of safety: the risk an abuser poses for a victim; the risk the intervention itself poses for a victim; the risk a victim or abuser’s cultural and social position pose to the victim; and, the risk a victim’s individual circumstances might pose.

For each woman and her children, what risks are generated by...

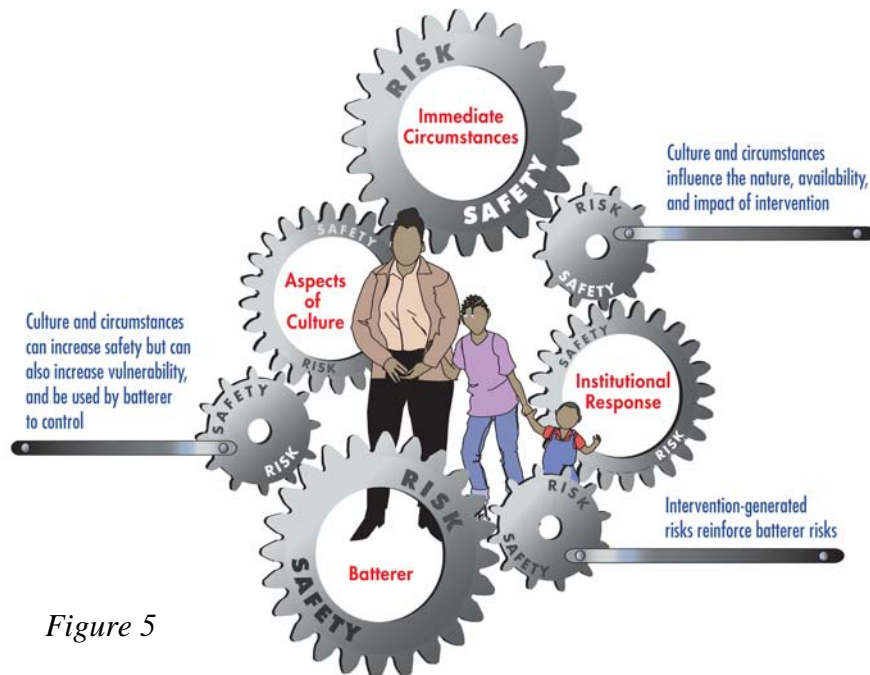


Figure 5

- Is there a chance at this point of intervention to increase the likelihood that the abuser will be held accountable for his or her use of violence?
- How might the intervention produce unintended consequences?
- How might victims from different backgrounds experience this intervention? Remember: there is no universal victim of battering.



Figure 6



# Definitions

*Texts* include words, images, and sounds, arranged in ways they can be read, seen, and heard apart from settings in which speakers and hearers, doers and watchers, are in each other's immediate presence. The number 911, for example, is a universal text in the United States. The screen on the automated teller machine is a text. The check that allows us to pay for items without cash is a text that most adults use today, but in a decade will likely be a thing of the past. Texts are so familiar and commonplace that we take them for granted.<sup>2</sup> We notice new texts introduced into our lives, such as debit cards, e-tickets, and text messaging. Texts are essential managing elements of modern society. Within institutions such as the legal system or the human services system, texts are the skeletons and circulatory systems that coordinate workers across agencies, disciplines, time, and locations. Workers and agencies cannot function without them.

Examples of texts that might be of interest to a CCR team include: 911 tapes and transcripts, dispatch logs, police response policies, criminal codes, police reports and supplemental forms, booking forms, written statements, prosecution policies, order for protection affidavits, child welfare screening forms, risk assessment tools, pre-sentence investigation procedures, domestic abuse crisis line logs, legal advocacy applications, victim resource brochures, and training curricula. These texts standardize how a domestic assault case gets processed in ways that override variations in individual practitioners' beliefs or values, or in some cases even skill level. In other words, a skilled practitioner working with a poor risk assessment tool will do poor work, and an unskilled worker using a good risk assessment tool will do better than her skill level would suggest.

**Text analysis** is a close, careful reading of these forms, reports, case files, policies, training curricula, matrices, and other printed, recorded, or visual materials in order to uncover a picture of how the institution has coordinated a worker to talk about and act on a case.

Keep in mind that most practitioners do not focus only on domestic violence cases. They process a certain step of a criminal case, a divorce case, or a civil case. These case processing steps were often not designed with the unique aspects of domestic violence cases in mind. Even case processing that has been specifically adapted for use in domestic abuse related cases, such as civil protection orders, is often mismatched with what is actually going on in people's lives. Through text analysis, an interagency team discovers 1) how workers are organized and coordinated to respond to domestic assault cases; and, 2) where and how that response produces a gap in safety for victims of battering. We can think of this process as understanding the anatomy of an institutional response.

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<sup>2</sup>Dorothy E. Smith, "Incorporating texts into ethnographic practice," in *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*, Dorothy E. Smith, ed., AltaMira Press, 2006 (forthcoming).

## Texts lead to investigation trails

Eight women gather around a table at the YWCA. They have been asked to help a local coordinating council identify problems in the system. One of the women sets a box in front of her. When it is Jean Brown's turn to introduce herself, she opens the box and says, "This! This is what you should figure out." She takes out a stack of paper nearly ten inches high. She starts turning over pages. "There're all these court orders and forms and letters and police reports. I have to fill them out, file them, and carry them with me. I've got two copies of this 'power and control wheel,' and three different safety plans I'm supposed to follow. Who is getting help here? What am I supposed to do with all of this? He's still breaking every court order. And I need someone for my son to talk to, I need rent money. I need someone to somehow make sense of all this for me."

Joe Smith works at the county emergency communications center. From his chair he sees three different computer screens. He can reach over to a three-ring binder filled with tip sheets and protocols on what to do if someone calls about a family of ducks crossing the highway, or screams coming from the next apartment. Tonight the phone rings and he answers: "911. What is your emergency?" He hears someone crying and breathing hard, then a young voice, "We need help. My dad's hurting my mom."

Jackie Jones works at the supervised visitation center. Mark Brown spends two hours there each Saturday morning with his children, Mary and Henry. After they leave, Jackie completes the *Visitation Observation Report*. The report form has four sections titled "interactions:" initial reactions, observed interactions with children, educational and recreational interactions, and separation interactions. She comments on each type of interaction by checking boxes next to sentences about these interactions. Her choices are to check: (a) Yes, (b) No, (c) N/A, or (d) Sporadic. During the two-hour visit, Henry, the seven-year-old boy, walked away from his father several times to look at the aquarium; each time he stayed there until his father called out to him. Based on her observation, Jackie checked "sporadic" under educational and recreational interactions and made a note: "Child appeared detached or unresponsive during visit."

Whenever institutions manage someone's situation as a "case," *texts* are involved. For Jean, the pile of paper she brought to the focus group has become the institutional version of her life. In one set of papers, she is a crime victim and a witness to that crime. In another, she is a petitioner in a civil protection order case. In still another, she is the subject of a child protection investigation. The final pile of paper concerns her as the client of a visitation center. As she suggests, there is a gap between the institutional or interagency response and what she really needs for her safety and well-being. For practitioners like Joe and Jackie, texts direct how they will act when the agencies and systems they work for step into the lives of Jean and Mark and their children. Neither of them will make up their own process for answering a 911 call or documenting a supervised visit.

Texts provide a backdrop for every institutional response. Like practitioners, they are actors in the case. They are the primary tools used to keep dozens, hundreds, and in some cities, thousands of workers from unleashing a form of institutional anarchy. Texts are the primary way of organizing and coordinating workers and standardizing practices across agencies, individuals and locations. They focus workers' attention on certain aspects of the case and direct their attention away from others. They limit the ability of individuals to act independently from an authorized or official response. A 911 dispatcher, advocate, patrol officer, or child welfare social worker performs within a boundary or frame of texts that directs whether, when, and how she or he will act in the case.

Understanding how texts work in cases can contribute enormously to an interagency response that keeps victims' needs at the center. A coordinated community response (CCR) can use text analysis in a number of key ways in its reform work. Text analysis can help a CCR:

- 1) Discover whether and how intended policy and practice changes have been institutionalized;
- 2) See how certain assumptions, concepts, terms, or theories are operating in how cases are being processed;
- 3) Discover how case management practices that were not designed with domestic violence in mind can be enhanced to account for the unique aspects of domestic violence cases;
- 4) Centralize attention to victim safety and offender accountability in the design of case processing within and across agencies;
- 5) See how case processing routines produce poor case outcomes;
- 6) Identify and craft solutions to practices that produce gaps in safety; and,
- 7) Understand how agencies organize and coordinate practitioners to respond to battering.

There are a number of core ways that institutions coordinate and organize workers to act within certain frameworks and boundaries. For purposes of this guide, we will call these core ways *organizing methods*. The figure below depicts these methods and Appendix R describes them in more detail. The key to effective text analysis is to stay focused, not on the individual skill level, knowledge base or motivation of individual practitioners, but on how texts standardize the ways workers take up and respond to the specifics of the cases before them. The eight core ways institutions coordinate these standardized responses are not all encompassing. You will discover institutional practices intended to shape individual responses that you cannot neatly fit into one of our eight categories. Create your own... there is always a ninth.

## Key Organizing Methods of Institutions



### **Texts are the primary tools institutions use to employ these organizing methods**

*Rules and regulations* tell workers what they ‘must’ or ‘shall’ or ‘will’ do. Crafting the language of a directive or policy is often fraught with political maneuverings and debate.

*Administrative processes* tell workers how they are to carry out the rules and regulations, often via texts such as computer screens, matrices, report writing formats, intake forms, and routing instructions.

*Concepts and theories* are embedded in the language and structure of texts.

*Training and skill building* are largely transmitted through texts.

*Systems of accountability* rely on texts to monitor, communicate, and evaluate.

*Missions and job functions* are communicated and coordinated through mission statements, job descriptions, checklists, and report writing formats.

*Resources* for both workers and those whose cases are being processed are allocated, assigned, and denied by texts.

*Linkages* across agencies, disciplines, time, and levels of government are made via case files, memoranda of understanding, and other documentation.

### **Texts are the glue holding workers together within any institution**

Texts are the driving, coordinating engine of large institutions, which could not operate without them. Those of us seeking to understand how institutional responses go right or wrong in domestic violence cases must examine the texts that are acting in case management processes. Texts are the window into the space where institutions meet up with real people’s lives.

Examining texts as a way of understanding an institution is like following a trail. Some communities conduct safety audits using the eight organizing methods as “Audit Trails” (Appendix R). In this guide we show how an interagency team can use texts as “investigation trails.”

When analyzing texts, reading with these eight organizing and coordinating methods in mind is a good way to keep your focus, frame your thinking, and coordinate your team. Texts are the window that let you see what is going on as cases are processed. Follow the texts like you would a trail of evidence. Let them show you, speak to you, stimulate your thoughts, and guide your investigation.

## Texts in action

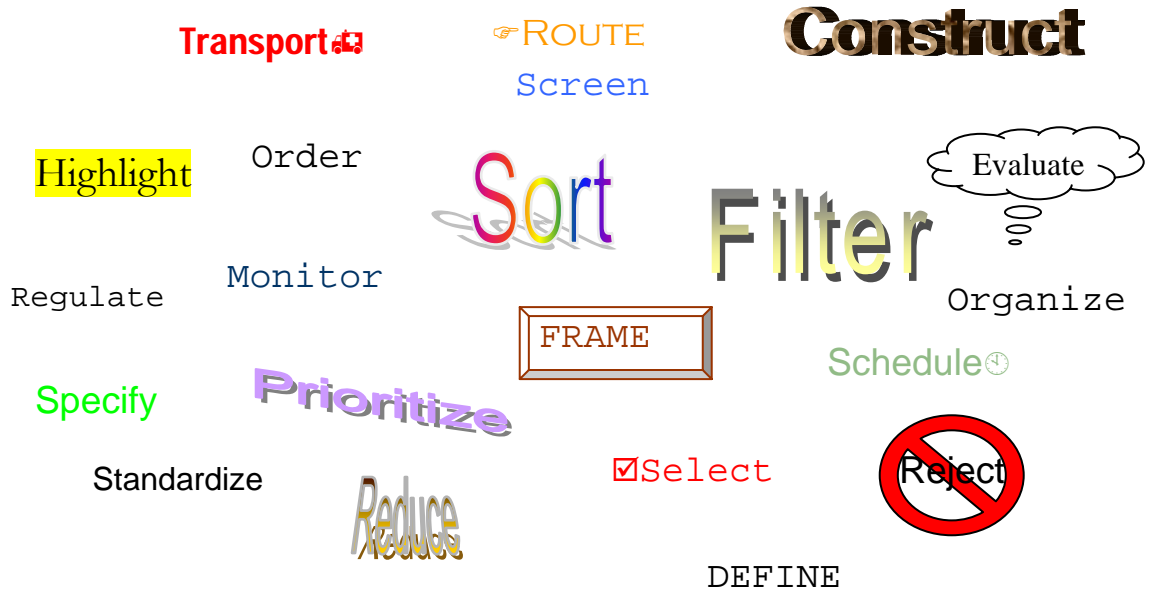
Texts frame and organize what we do in such familiar ways that we typically do not notice or think about them as we go about our routines. As mentioned earlier, it is only when a new form of text enters our work practice that we pay attention to it. For example:

- Susan conducts initial interviews for the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) nutrition program helping new mothers. The health department has recently introduced new forms with three screening questions for domestic violence. Now she must ask these questions and be prepared for an answer that may indicate that the client is being abused.
- An experienced 911 call-taker moves through the fields on the screen in front of her without a second thought, until a new field is added, such as one requiring verification that the order for protection file has been checked. Where that field is placed on the screen changes how quickly and automatically she enters information from the call.
- A 2004 Supreme Court decision relating to the admissibility of statements in court alters the ways in which law enforcement officers make arrests, interrogate suspects, and write reports. The decision in *Crawford v. Washington* means that police and prosecutors must rethink their approach to evidence-based prosecution.

In whatever job we have, most of us are used to working with all manner of rules, forms, policies, lesson plans, etc. Our collective list would have hundreds of items. We are not used to thinking about *texts* as having an active quality, much like another person sitting at our side. Yet when we engage with them, **texts are always active**, always directing us to do something, to ask, inform, evaluate, decide, screen, refer, add, eliminate, share, deny, or engage in a myriad of other actions.

Text analysis helps us understand this dynamic quality; it helps us to see texts in action, both in how they come to represent, or misrepresent, a person’s experience, and how they frame what a practitioner can or cannot do. It is helpful to think of text in different ways, depending upon the text and the role it is playing in case processing. Overall, texts are: 1) an institutional version of what is going on; and, 2) an actor or agent that carries rules, regulations, policies, and practices between practitioners and across institutions.

# Texts . . .



A particular text is not an isolated entity, but is *located within a sequence of actions* in which other practitioners are involved. For a case to be handled by people in diverse settings, each with specialized tasks, a written record is kept, comprising text that moves from one practitioner to another, from one point in case processing to the next.

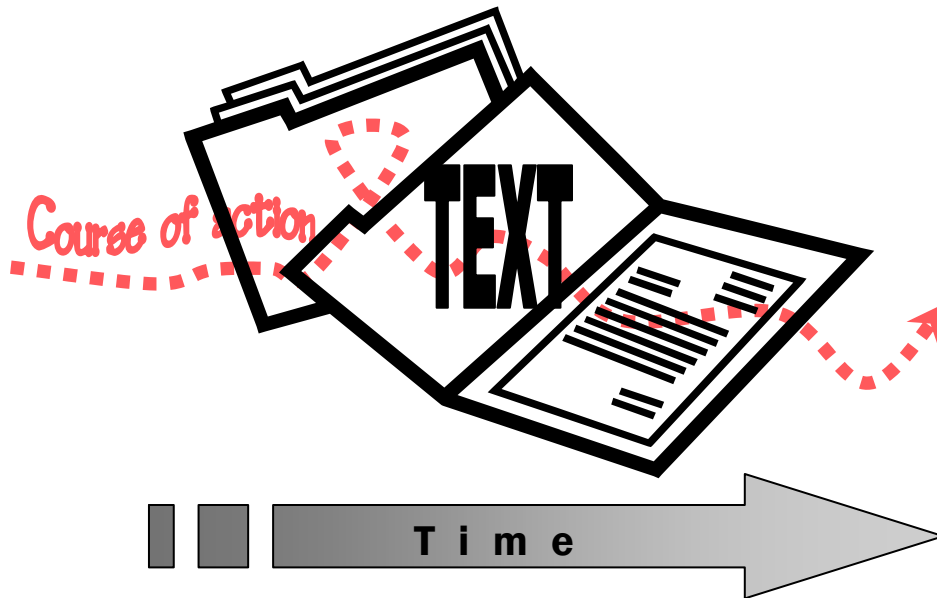


Figure 7

We use text analysis to understand this sequence of action. *Where and how is a particular text located, created, and used, and with what impact on the case?* In a coordinated community response, for example, we want to know where, how, and to what degree a 911 dispatcher, police officer, or other worker's attention is focused on safety and accountability, and how practitioners are linked together to do that collectively. We are interested in both the adult victim's and the children's safety. We are interested in undoing the harm that has been done to both. We are trying to not intervene in ways that inadvertently add to people's vulnerabilities to further abuse. Figure 8 illustrates the sequence of action as a case moves in the criminal legal system from 911 to arraignment, and the variety of texts that direct workers at each point.

# Finding Text

## Criminal Justice Case Processing

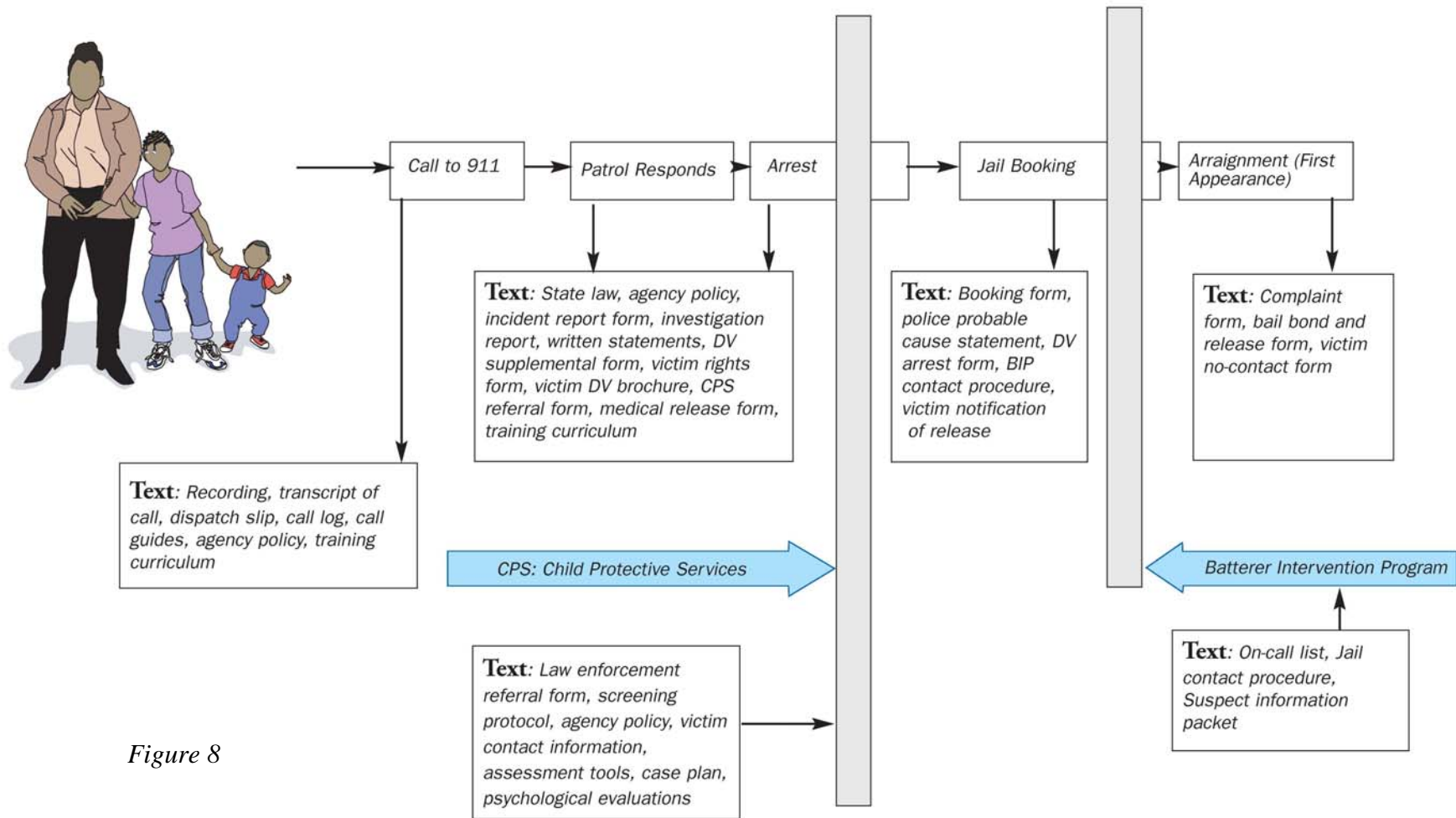


Figure 8



# Types of text

In the context of interagency response to domestic violence, text analysis involves four primary kinds of text: regulating, administrative, case-specific documents, and case files.

## Regulating texts

Regulating texts direct the management of an institution; they define what workers must do. Think of regulating texts as **the rules**, established via political processes within local, state, and federal legislative bodies, public agencies, service agency boards of directors, and agency directors or administrators. Regulating texts carry the rules and regulations that define the scope of agency responsibility, direct internal operations, and shape aspects of service delivery and communication within and between agencies. For example:

- Laws and ordinances
- Court rulings
- Jury instructions
- Legislation
- Administrative rules of governmental regulating bodies (such as the Peace Officers Standards Board or the Department of Family Services)
- Agency policies and directives (such as arrest and pre-sentence investigation policies)
- Policies of insurance companies or medical facilities

Regulating texts are largely invisible. The regulation or rule itself is often not present in any case file or record, although it is represented in all phases of case processing in how practitioners construct, complete, and act on forms, reports, and records. An important dimension of regulating texts is that they regulate *other* texts, notably administrative texts, such as forms. They regulate how other texts are produced.

For example, you might read a police report and notice the officer has arrested the predominant aggressor in a case where both parties used illegal violence. The department's arrest policy is operating in the case. Does the policy require the arrest of only the predominant aggressor, or simply encourage it? Does it reflect the language of any state law regulating arrest in domestic assault cases? Prior to adoption of the arrest policy, is it likely that both parties would have been arrested, or perhaps neither party would have been arrested? The agency policy drives the response; it regulates officers' actions and says, "Here is what you must do."

When a CCR team is analyzing certain types of case files, such as police reports, it is important that each team member understand the regulating texts that could and should be operative. Team members are then better prepared to understand the framework behind the texts they are analyzing and to critique those regulations in their analysis.

## Administrative texts

Administrative texts pick up the terms, concepts, categories, and frames of the relevant regulating texts and translate them into texts to **guide workers in carrying out the rules** set forth in the regulating texts. They are the key to standardizing how practitioners carry out those policies, laws, regulations, and

mandates. The most common administrative text is the *form*, e.g., the intake form, report writing form, or parenting assessment form. Administrative texts are the tools the institution has created to distinguish what it can act on and how it can act. They ensure that each worker acts on the case within the intended scope of actions. They are the voice of the absent supervisor: “You are authorized to do this, in this way.” Administrative texts include:

- Forms
- Templates
- Matrices
- Decision-making trees
- Checklists
- Guidelines
- Report writing formats
- Routing instructions
- Protocols
- Pocket cards

Different administrative texts enter into and are part of practitioners’ work in different ways. Through administrative texts, workers record and document things that have happened, initiate new proceedings or actions, communicate and link institutional events and workers together, and select the information from what is going on in real life that will have institutional significance. Not every administrative text guides a worker in the same way. For example, asking questions to fill in a form is not the same as looking up the intersections of variables in a matrix to determining sentencing recommendations.

Administrative texts help the worker translate the specifics of a case into an institutional category to be managed, such as misdemeanor assault, recanting witness, failure to protect, hearsay evidence, custodial parent, high-risk offender, low-risk offender, or uncooperative witness/client. In text analysis we watch for this translation from what is happening in someone’s life to an institutional category, and question its relationship to safety and other intervention goals.

## Case-specific documents

Case-specific documents are primarily those **produced by workers** in the system. They orient indirectly to the regulating texts and more directly to specific administrative texts. They document actions taken or translate observations, collected information, and tests into a report or commentary of some kind.

Examples of case-specific documents include police reports, Guardian ad Litem reports, visitation center reports, CPS case notes, petitions to the court, affidavits, pre-sentence investigations, psychological evaluations, and transcripts of hearings and 911 calls. They are shaped by the administrative text that guides the worker in producing them. See Appendix A for two pre-sentence investigation (PSI) reports that use different administrative formats. Read these and think about how these standardizing forms drive the actions and commentary of the probation officer using them in his or her work. They illustrate the connection between administrative text (in this case, the PSI format) and the interpretive and documentary qualities of case-specific text.

## Case files

A case file is not in itself a particular kind of text, but a specific way of organizing texts. It is a collection of case-specific documents and administrative texts organized under an individual's name, and needed by the agency employees working on the case. Most agencies have their own version of "the case file." It is shaped by the function of the agency that produces it, along with rules governing record keeping, agency policies, and resources.

For example a *prosecution case file* has a number of items produced outside the prosecutor's office, but important to its case processing function such as indicators or copies of evidence (e.g., 911 recordings, medical records, written or taped statements, and photos), the police report for the current incident, a criminal history print-out, a victim impact statement, a copy of the bail or other release order, and sentencing orders. A prosecution file may also include copies of letters or e-mail to and from the victim, defense attorney, advocates, probation agent, and batterer intervention program. It typically includes copies of motions filed and notes or attorney work-product, often written on court documents or sticky notes and indicating appearances, what happened at them, and contact with the victim and witnesses. In some instances the prosecution case file may consist only of a copy of the police report stapled to a page of notes indicating the disposition. The case file organizes a prosecutor to identify the offender, tie the charges to the law, document the pretrial process or plea-bargain, and record the completion of required stages in the criminal proceeding.

Prosecutors themselves document relatively little. They depend for the most part on documentation done by others, such as dispatchers, patrol officers, investigators. In contrast, child protection workers who are at the front line document, document, and document. A *child protection file* begins with a form filled out by the initial screener and includes every contact the agency or worker has on the case. It includes screening tools and risk assessments, case notes, summaries of court hearings, referral histories, and documentation of all interactions that may be needed to support a decision to bring a child into protective care.

A *supervised visitation case file* might include intake forms, divorce and custody orders, copies of drivers' licenses, wage statements, release forms, correspondence with physicians, Guardian ad Litem contacts, observation notes, reports to the court, and psychologists' evaluation reports.

Agencies use case files to gather the information they need to process the case according to their function in the system. The content and organization of an agency's case files speaks volumes to the team analyzing them. The team looks to see how the whole file is put together. What kind of information is assembled as part of the case file? What is included in and omitted from the file? How are different items in the case file used and at what step in case processing? Who is the custodian of the file? Where is it kept, and who has access to it? What in the case file makes a worker accountable to the supervisory process? These are all key questions when analyzing the file as a way to see into the daily operations of case management and processing.

Imagine that you were asked to go to community X and look to see if the worker doing Task A has everything she or he needs to do the task assigned, and if that worker is gathering and documenting the information subsequent interveners will need to do their jobs. What should be in the case file for this worker to do a good job? (*Good* means takes competent actions that address the problem we are analyzing.) Did s/he have what was needed? Did s/he create what subsequent interveners will need to also do a competent job?

No one in the system has all of these case files in one place. When a CCR team decides to do a text analysis project it might collect case files from a number of intervening agencies, creating a picture of the case no individual agency had when processing it. This custom-made file is not the same as an agency

case file because it only exists for the purpose of helping the team understand how the multiple agencies processing this family as a case (or series of cases) organized workers within and across agencies to centralize safety. In day-to-day practice, each agency assembles its case file for its own purposes. Bringing them together in a unique interagency case file makes visible the fragmented character of the picture of someone’s life that is found in the individual agency files.

All texts, even what appears to be a completely objective administrative form, carry assumptions that organize workers to think, talk, and write about the cases and the people whose experiences are being managed as cases. Regulating texts such as an arrest policy or sentencing guidelines are clearly imbued with certain assumptions, linked to specific theories and frameworks for state intervention in a case. But less obvious administrative texts also carry similar assumptions. Each worker who puts his or her imprint on that case file will draw from certain institutionally acceptable ways of talking about the case, the people, and the intervening agency or institution. The worker who reads, interprets, and contributes to these texts reads through and writes within a professional “discourse,” or way of talking about the social world in which our interventions occur.


The theories, philosophies, language, and categories used by a discipline such as social work, the law, psychology, or law enforcement are all at work in the texts that a CCR project might analyze. For example, a child protection intake form, a pre-sentence investigation format, and a Guardian ad Litem’s parenting skills checklist reflect concepts of harm, risk, punishment, restitution, and good parenting that are anchored in the professional discourses of social work, corrections, and child welfare. Concepts, theories, and assumptions will be most visible in the case-specific texts, but they are present in all institutional texts and in the way case files are constructed and used.



### *Uncovering Assumptions*<sup>3</sup>

The four types of text are interconnected, and a single text can cross all four types, as well as reflect multiple methods of standardizing workers actions. For example, a police incident report will be 1) framed by state domestic violence and report writing laws as well as agency policy language (regulating text); 2) written on a form provided by the department requiring that certain information be recorded (administrative text); 3) shaped by the interpretive and documentary methods built into local police practice; and, 4) show up in a number of case files, including prosecution, the court, probation, batterers’ intervention, and CPS, all with slightly different uses and meanings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>  This symbol indicates that information elsewhere in this manual will be helpful for cross-reference. Please refer to the table of contents to locate this additional information.

<sup>4</sup> For example, a police report in a prosecutor’s file is the primary document the prosecutor uses to charge a case, determine whether to negotiate a plea, prepare a case, and contemplate an acceptable sentence. That same police report in a CPS file might be evidence to show that domestic abuse occurred, and that children were present and witnessed the abuse, constituting a form of neglect; in a batterers’ intervention program it is used as a record of the violence in the incident that led to arrest.

## Uncovering assumptions

Discovering concepts and theories at work is the most challenging aspect of work practices to find and follow when analyzing text. The recommendations and strategies in this section will help uncover this trail.

All texts carry assumptions. All texts are constructed within a framework of theories, language, and categories. However, these frameworks and assumptions are largely invisible. They are found not so much in a specific format as in the language and organization of forms and procedures. Around every worker in every agency are assumptions that organize how that worker thinks, talks, and writes about the cases and the people involved. These assumptions are shaped by the professional “discourse” carried by a discipline, such as social work, law, and psychology. This *discourse* provides the terms by which practitioners operating in an institutional context can speak to one another, construct policies and processes, and frame something as acceptable for official action. The following table illustrates the connections between the kinds of texts, assumptions, and discourses that a CCR text analysis team might encounter.

<b>Texts</b>	<b>Concepts &amp; theories</b>	<b>Professional disciplines and discourses</b>
911-recording, transcript, and dispatch logs	Emergency, response time, distressed caller	Public safety telecommunications and dispatch
Arrest report	Probable cause, elements of a crime, victim, witness, offender	Criminal legal system; policing
CPS intake form	Harm, risk, best interests of child, abuse and neglect	Child welfare, child development, social work
Pre-sentence investigation report	Punishment, restitution, victim impact, risk assessment	Corrections
Guardian ad Litem’s parenting skills checklist	Appropriate parenting, best interest of child, legal standing	Child welfare law

Practitioners within these disciplines and across the systems that link them, such as the civil and criminal legal systems, will be familiar with one another’s assumptions and language. These conceptual frameworks reach practitioners via formal education, on-the-job training, informal discussions among coworkers, staff meetings and case conferences, professional or trade journals, training seminars, workshops, and professional or topic-specific conferences.

How practitioners talk about a case often appears to be the neutral or objective work of an individual responding to a specific set of circumstances, yet the structure and language of reports and documents reflect pre-formulated categories that carry ways of thinking and acting about the case. We can discover these categories and concepts when reading case documents. Even as a text analyst you are applying certain rules to your analysis. For example, whenever you see the use of an institutional category, ask:

- ? What actions, experiences, or features are lumped together and treated as part of this category?
- ? What else is in this category?
- ? Does using this category make important aspects of the case more or less visible?
- ? Is this category an accurate reflection of what is going on for the person whose life has become “the case”?
- ? Does this category work for some people to which it is applied, but not others? Who does the category fail to work for?
- ? Does this category overly generalize?
- ? Does it have safety implications?
- ? Does it have implications for the issue you are investigating?

In analyzing texts related to domestic violence case processing, ask the above questions of the following kinds of categories.

- misdemeanor/felony
- uncooperative witness
- 911 code, a domestic verbal only
- failure to protect
- gone on arrival
- custodial parent
- first offender
- minor incident
- technical violation of the order
- classic battered woman
- cycle of violence
- dysfunctional
- high-conflict relationship
- poor self-esteem
- early childhood trauma
- parenting classes
- anger management

Similarly, whenever you are reading a document and the practitioner takes an action, ask, “What is the assumption underlying this action?” What is a CPS worker assuming when he or she sends a woman who is being battered to get a protection order, even though she resists it as too hostile an action toward her partner? When a prosecutor’s office automatically asks for a no-contact order at arraignment court, what is it assuming? Behind and around every action is a concept about that action.

## Framing devices

The idea of framing devices is helpful in uncovering assumptions. Certain texts or concepts or even words act as a device to frame the case, to shape what the practitioner sees, hears, and reads. The following little story—a work of fiction—helps explain the notion of framing devices.

A police officer is sitting in Denny’s Restaurant one morning having breakfast. Her radio comes on and the dispatcher sends her to a domestic at 123 Brown Street, involving Jane and John Doe. The Denny’s counter is a busy place; heads turn toward the officer as those around her listen to the dispatcher. “Can I go?” says the social worker. “I know that family.” “Me, too,” says the advocate, “I’ve been working with Jane.” “Count me in,” adds the probation officer. “John’s on my caseload.” “What about me,” the landlord pipes in. “That’s my building.”

“Fine,” says the officer. “I could use some help for a change.” All five squeeze into the officer’s squad car and follow her into the house when they arrive at 123 Brown Street. The officer scans the scene and sees a broken window, a hole in a wall, and a man and woman standing on either side of the kitchen table. The woman is distraught and swearing. The officer directs her to sit on the sofa and asks the man to sit at the kitchen table with the probation officer. The officer goes over to the woman and asks, “What happened here?”

The social worker hears a baby crying and sees a baby lying on a bed next to a broken window, glass on the bed and the floor. She picks the baby up and notices that his diaper needs to be changed.

The probation officer sits next to the man, close enough to smell for alcohol. “Well, John, when did you get back in town?”

The landlord inspects the hole in the wall, and then the window. “This’ll have to come out of the security deposit.”

The advocate sits next to the woman. From this location she can see everyone in the room. “Take a deep breath,” she tells her, and hands her a Kleenex.

### Each character’s job function was a framing device

- 1) The officer was entering a crime scene. She was filtering everything through that lens: “Is this scene safe? Is there a crime here? Is there any evidence? Is it enough to get a case off the ground?”
- 2) The social worker saw the child on the bed in a cold room, with broken glass nearby. She was seeing everything through the lens of child safety. “Is this child safe here, is he injured? Is there food in the house? Is it livable? Is there a responsible adult present?”
- 3) The probation officer wanted to know if his client was violating his conditions of probation. “Has he been drinking? Does he live here? How long has he been back in town? He’s supposed to be working in Michigan for another two months.”
- 4) The landlord wanted to know whether his property had been damaged and whether the conditions of the lease had been broken. “Who put the hole in the wall? Who broke the window? Is the rent paid up? Who’s living here? How many times have the police come in the last six months?”
- 5) The advocate is watching what everyone else is doing to be sure no one messes with the woman. “How are they talking to her? Is she going to get arrested? Will CPS take her baby away from

her? How has he been threatening her? Does she have rent money? Is she going to get fired if she's late to work again? Will she be evicted now?"

### **Framing devices are powerful; they put events in very specific containers**

A law can be a framing device. For example, until recently there was no category of abuse in child protection called "failure to protect." When a woman was being beaten by her husband and he was not hitting the children, CPS would have referred the woman for help, but it would rarely intervene in that situation. Now that witnessing and being exposed to domestic violence are in themselves considered harmful to a child, CPS workers use an entirely new lens when intervening in these cases. In some states, the difficult part for workers is that they must now issue findings of neglect against women who cannot get free of the violence. This change in policy has created significantly different interventions on the part of CPS, and a new frame of reference when talking with battered women. New theories and research findings create new categories of offenses and interventions. Contrary to what practitioners often believe, there is nothing objective or neutral in their construction and impact.

Language can be a framing device. Being attentive to language, terms, categories, and specialized or unfamiliar jargon will help you locate concepts and theories at work. For example, in a supervised visitation setting, the words "custodial parent" and "non-custodial parent" frame assumptions about who is at risk. The non-custodial parent is assumed to be dangerous, posing risks to the children and the custodial parent. This assumption shapes the ways in which parents arrive at, enter, and leave the center, as well as how monitors observe and document parent-child interactions. Most centers have the non-custodial parent arrive at the center fifteen to twenty minutes before the visit, in order to be sure the custodial parent is safe when entering the building. Centers have various security measures in place inside the building, from security guards to cameras and pagers, to ensure the safety of the children during visits and exchanges. Yet, in a significant number of cases the primary victim, and therefore, the one facing the greatest chance of being harmed, is a non-custodial battered woman who has lost custody of her children to her abuser. The greatest place of danger for her may be in the parking lot, at the bus stop, or on the sidewalk that she uses to reach the center. Paying attention to language as a framing device for intervening workers helps to uncover the link between the agency discourse and unsafe practices.

Framing devices are active in a worker's every action. They are frequently put into operation via a text, such as a form, report, or checklist. With every document you read, ask, "What frames the construction, completion, and use of this text?" "How does the text or the discourse in which it is located frame the interaction between the worker and the case, or between the worker and the people whose experiences are being processed as a case?" The framing device will be embedded in the discourse, as we described at the beginning of this section. The concepts of custodial and non-custodial parent, for example, are carried by the discourses of child welfare, child development, and family law.

It is difficult for us to identify our own assumptions. We are so familiar with and accustomed to the theories and concepts that shape our daily lives and work that they seem the norm. Part of recognizing the assumptions behind institutional action is starting with a CCR team that brings a diversity of practitioner and life experience to the analysis. It increases the likelihood of someone reading through a new lens: *What does that term mean? Why is this case classified in this way?*



## Going deeper: 12 features of institutions

By analyzing text, we try to discover 1) how workers are organized and coordinated to respond to domestic assault cases; and, 2) where and how that response produces a gap between the needs of people being processed as cases and the institutional actions and interventions.<sup>5</sup>

That gap will be located between the realities of human experience and the ways in which institutions take up pieces of that experience. A woman's single call to 911 when she is being beaten, for example, activates a complex institutional apparatus that can turn her life into a collection of cases: a criminal court case, a medical case, a divorce case, a child custody case, a supervised visitation case, a child welfare case, a shelter case, a housing case, a legal advocacy case, an immigration case, and more.

Each institution takes up only the part of her experience that can be acted on as an official case. The full complexity and context of her life gets left behind. In one of our opening scenarios, Jean Brown describes aspects of the gap between what she needs and the institutional response:

“There're all these court orders and forms and letters and police reports. I have to fill them out, file them, and carry them with me. I've got two copies of this 'power and control wheel,' and three different safety plans I'm supposed to follow. Who is getting help here? What am I supposed to do with all of this? He's still breaking every court order. And I need someone for my son to talk to. I need rent money, and I need someone to somehow make sense of all of this for me.”

From our institutional change work over the past thirty years and our more recent safety audit work, an understanding of the ways in which the nature of institutions contributes to this gap has emerged.<sup>6</sup> We have identified twelve features of institutions that are always somehow related to the poor outcomes of cases. These features are present in all aspects of institutional work. They are central to the nature of institutions. Reform work cannot necessarily eliminate these features, but it must account for them in order to establish practices and interventions that take up the complexity of peoples' lives and the corresponding complexity of safety as completely as possible. In a coordinated community response, we want to recognize those features at work and minimize their impact. We cannot get rid of them, but we can control for them in how we organize and coordinate intervention. Here is a brief description of each feature.<sup>7</sup>

### Institutions...

1. **Fragment complex lives.** Institutions fragment experience into distinct cases and further separate and divide cases into processing steps and sub-steps, with specialists at each point. For example, a woman who is beaten in her home becomes a 911 “domestic,” a mandatory arrest case, a

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<sup>5</sup> In most of our work we focus on safety for victims of battering, but many teams analyze text to explore related issues in the institutional response, such as accounting for culture, attention to strengthening the victim's relationship with her children, or interventions with special populations.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see *Community-Based Analysis of the U.S. Legal System's Intervention in Domestic Assault Cases Involving Indigenous Women – Final Report to the National Institute of Justice*, Mending the Sacred Hoop, December 2002 (“Uncovering Problematic Features of the U.S. Legal System, pp. 61-108); and, *Building Safety for Battered Women and Their Children into the Child Protection System*, Ellen Pence and Terri Taylor, 2003 (“Structural Problems Integral to Administrative and Conceptual Practices of CPS Work,” pp. 7-12). Both publications can be found at [www.praxisinternational.org](http://www.praxisinternational.org).

<sup>7</sup> A more detailed discussion of the 12 Features is available on DVD from Praxis.

prosecution case, a child protection case, a medical case, an immigration case, a welfare case, and so on.

2. **Coordinate through texts.** Texts coordinate workers across various sites, functions, tasks, agencies, time, disciplines, and institutional actions. Texts are the glue that holds together dozens of separate actions by practitioners who may or may not know each other, know the subjects of the form or report before them, or work in the same agency, town, city, or county. They link people who have never spoken to each other, but who collectively process people's experiences as institutional cases. Texts are the primary instruments of institutional work.
3. **Rely on the use of categories.** Institutions use categories to lump dissimilar events or situations together, oversimplify complex situations, and authorize institutional action. Domestic violence, mandatory arrest, non-custodial parent, and recanting victim are all categories that lump people and situations together, carry certain theories and assumptions, and generate specific institutional actions.
4. **Operate on a time different than lived time.** Institutional time overrides lived time, with different meanings for people being acted upon than those acting within the institution. The nine months it takes to charge and conclude a misdemeanor domestic assault case, for example, is not set according to a victim's needs, but by filing periods, court calendars, and staffing levels.
5. **Privilege institutional functioning over individual needs.** Institutions exist in and through a standardization of process, procedure, and action which is not necessarily responsive to the actual circumstances of individual lives. Institutional processes are designed to meet certain institutional objectives, such as prosecute criminal cases, investigate crime scenes, or protect children from neglect or abuse. Workers define success by accomplishing an assigned task within a larger institutional process. The people whose experiences are being processed are fit into the process; the processes are rarely adjusted to fit the specific circumstances of each case. At the end of the case, institutional needs have been met, but not the needs of the person whose case was being processed. Equally important is how this feature influences all the small steps and interactions as the case grinds and winds its way.
6. **Create communication without dialogue.** In order to process cases, practitioners need information. They collect and analyze information within the discourse of their field, the specific institutional task they are accomplishing, the directives and protocols in which the case is rooted, and the sequence of actions in which their task is located. Within this framework, people frequently become data points; communication is one-way, from institutional workers to the individuals they are helping. It is framed and filtered through forms, rules, liability concerns, and professional concepts and theories. For example, two-thirds of many shelters' intake process is taken up with gathering grant-specific demographic information (age, race, income, education, children's ages and education levels) and reviewing and obtaining a signed agreement to the shelter rules. Child protection files can contain hundreds of pages on a case, yet the reader would not have a full understanding of each child's experiences with abuse or their primary sources, levels, and capacities for resilience.
7. **Engage in conceptual practices that organize how workers think and act.** Institutions carry the "discourse," or the theories, philosophies, language, and categories produced by political, social, and intellectual power structures. Discourse shapes the ways that practitioners determine an official or actionable case. Institutional regulations and administrative protocols carry authorized ways of thinking about and acting on a case. A practitioner such as a probation agent is drawn into a certain way of talking about the suspect to the prosecuting attorney, the victim, the defendant, and the judge. The pre-sentence investigation format shapes the way the probation agent talks and writes about the case.

8. **Create a fictitious universal person as a standard.** Institutions treat real people in relationship to fictitious universal types that become a standard against which real people are measured. In probation, for example, there are clients who are “amenable to treatment”; in prosecution, “cooperative witnesses”; and in child protection, “cooperative clients.” Parenting assessment forms, risk assessment tools, and rehabilitation curricula tend to anchor their content on a notion of a norm, on a person who represents “appropriate” mothering or fathering, or the “classic” battered woman or batterer. This fictitious universal person cannot take into account the complexity of individual lives and social positions. Its design is neither neutral nor objective, but represents an ideal type produced by dominant power structures and may be imposed on those outside to their disadvantage.
9. **Mask institutional limitations and failures.** Conduct a focus group with ten probation officers in any court house in the country and they will generate a list of problems with enforcement of court orders, inadequate resources to conduct appropriate sentencing recommendations, or failures in the ability of the system to meaningfully supervise violent clients. Similarly, a child protection worker focus group would generate list upon list of problems in how the field is designed to protect children. These institutional shortcomings contribute to re-offenses and offenders repeatedly exposing children to violence. But when the practitioner stands up in a courtroom or files a report, the shortcomings of the institution are rarely mentioned. They are masked, made invisible. Failure is attributed to clients or individuals involved in the case, not to institutional limitations.
10. **Have weak systems of accountability to intervention goals.** Institutions build systems of accountability into case processing steps in many ways, including appeal procedures, lawsuits, evaluations, ombudsmen, credentialing, and quality control surveys. These systems often make practitioners feel watched at every turn, yet victims of abuse feel left out of the accountability process. There are limited ways in which the system is directly accountable to the needs of specific victims. Some institutional measures even put victims at further risk, such as when a prosecutor charges victims of battering with assisting in the commission of a crime if they have contact with the subjects of their restraining orders, and when a judge upholds such actions. Or, when police make dual arrests in cases where one person is clearly using less violence or using reactive violence, and is vulnerable to an ongoing pattern of abuse by the predominant aggressor. These responses are problematic in terms of their accountability to victims’ safety and well-being. There are also weak systems of accountability by one intervening agency and practitioner to another. Police routinely produce reports that hamper prosecutors’ ability to convict; prosecutors make deals that limit probation officers’ ability to hold offenders accountable for new offenses or breaches of probation; and, judges issue orders and regularly fail to enforce them. These disconnects within the system are constant sources of friction and frustration within an interagency response.
11. **Use coercion to gain compliance.** Institutions have varying capacities to coerce compliance from people whose cases are being processed. They also have boundaries around the use of coercion by practitioners and within processes. Nonetheless, institutions do use coercion and at times that coercion is abusive, ineffective, and dangerous. For example, battered mothers with young children at home must get restraining orders against their partners within ten days following a police call or their children will be removed from the home; women who refuse to testify in a criminal case against their abusers are incarcerated or fined; or, women who come home at night to a shelter after they have been drinking are asked to leave.
12. **Individualize the social.** People get plucked from their families, neighborhoods, and social and economic settings and treated as if they existed apart from those connections. Institutions treat social problem that are linked together (e.g., poverty, violence, illiteracy, and homelessness) as problems of individual failures or shortcomings. Institutions are not well-equipped to link causes

of these problems together when proposing solutions, either on an individual level working with people or on a community level when working together.

When reading text, if you and your team keep these problematic features of large institutions in mind you will be able to read more deeply and gain a better understanding of what is happening in your community's response to domestic assault. You are not looking for the 12 Features specifically, but you will start seeing them as you notice gaps between what people need and the official or institutional response to the case.

Recognition of the features at work often comes via impressions and moments when you say "aha!" or, "hmmm, I wonder..." For example, you start reading police reports and begin to notice that every time a woman is an alcoholic, the investigation is marginal. Or, you listen to 911 calls and notice that whenever the operator has difficulty understanding the caller, the coding on the call gets changed from "domestic assault" to "trouble with party." You begin to see categories, the fictitious universal person, and communication without dialogue.

## Keeping the real person at the center

People’s stories are not told on their own terms. They are framed by what records such as [the psychological report] have said about them. Case records and case histories are the textual form in which a particular individual is represented institutionally. This is how s/he is recognized and understood. Who she is, her history, and other relevant matters as they are written into the case history become her institutional representation and organize how s/he will be understood in institutional contexts . . . The story is organized around her but not as an individual with a particular biography and experience, but as she has been given institutional presence in the various records that have been made of her by institutional representatives (such as the court psychologist).<sup>8</sup>

In text analysis we dig deep into the ways in which texts both focus workers’ attention and stand in for someone’s experience. As you read forms or reports or proceed page by page through a case file, keep the real person at the center.

- What can we know about the people whose experiences are distilled in these pages?
- How does this text shape the relationships between workers in the intervening agencies (i.e., the officer, advocate, social worker, judge, custody evaluator, or visitation monitor) and the people (the woman, child, or man) whose life experiences and situations are being processed as cases?
  - What aspects of this person’s life are brought forward for official action?
  - How are aspects of this person’s life fragmented, categorized, or transformed?
  - How does institutional time take precedence over everyday or real time for this person?

For example, consider Rachel’s experience, as illustrated in Appendix Q, and imagine the web of case processing, with its many disconnected cases, overlaid with the realities of her everyday life: her daughter needs to get to band practice, her sister wants to plan a surprise party for their mother, she is missing too much time at work, she is behind with the bills and the phone has been shut off, her son has a fever, her daughter wants a friend to sleep over, taxes are due, the kids both get chicken pox, they ask repeatedly about when their father is coming home, she has not heard anything from the prosecutor’s office or the legal aid attorney in weeks, and her partner calls alternately wanting to work things out and threatening “you’ll be sorry.”

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<sup>8</sup> Dorothy E. Smith, *Analyzing Court Psychologists’ Evaluations of Women in Relation to Custody Cases*, November 2000; prepared as a training resource for Praxis.

# Asking questions of texts

## Key questions to ask in text analysis

Whatever the approach and in whatever setting we encounter and analyze text, there are essential questions to ask. These questions provide a foundation for constructing worksheets and guiding analysis with work groups and the text analysis team. They are described here and included in Appendix P as a handout that you can provide to your team when preparing them for text analysis assignments and discussions.

- 1) ***How is this text used?***  
What does this worker do with it?  
What actions does she or he take as a result of this text?
- 2) ***How is this text created?***  
Who compiles, completes, or fills it out?  
What does that worker need to know in order to do so?  
What had to happen for it to be completed?
- 3) ***Where does this text sit in the sequence of actions in case processing?***  
Who reads it?  
Where did it come from?  
Who and what precede it? How are they linked?  
Where does it go from here? Who and what follows it? How are they linked?
- 4) ***How does this text standardize and set boundaries around workers' actions?***  
Imagine yourself in the worker's position; how would this text organize and coordinate your actions?  
Imagine this text as an actor in the process; what is it doing: how does it link, direct, screen, prioritize, categorize, define, ask, inform, decide, refer, add, eliminate, deny . . . ?

### Keep the 8 Investigative Trails in sight

- 5) ***How does this text account for different social standings and life circumstances?***  
How does this text adapt to different people's needs?  
How does this text account for language, class, religion, race, nationality, communication, sexuality, residency status, and other aspects of culture?
- 6) ***How might this text produce a problematic outcome for safety or accountability?***  
What unintended consequences have been or might be produced by this text?  
For which victims of battering might the action directed by this text be harmful?



*Getting organized for text analysis*

## Four teams and four approaches

We encounter and ask questions of text in different settings. As a text analysis coordinator, you have the primary responsibility for determining which text to review, how many examples to include, and which approaches to use. Half of the work in text analysis is gathering the material, changing identifying names, and organizing the forms, reports, or case files in a way that the audit team can easily digest its contents. You may use one or more of the following approaches, depending upon what point of intervention your CCR is studying. Most likely you will use a combination in order to provide as much depth to your text analysis as possible. Regardless of the approach, as the coordinator you should read all of the forms, reports, or other text that the team will be analyzing. Individual members of the team will not be so wide-ranging, but will cover a smaller sample of text.

We begin with profiles of four different text analysis teams to illustrate the variety of investigations and texts that might be involved in an interagency text analysis project.

### Team 1: Dual arrests

This team wants to figure out why there are so many dual arrests in the community, which requires a fairly limited approach to texts. This team will:

- 1) Read the state law and department policy to see what it says about dual arrests, if anything.
- 2) Read the state law and relevant case law to fully understand the parameters of self- defense in these types of cases in this particular state.
- 3) Read any instructions officers have received about responding to and documenting domestic assaults. This might include such texts as training bulletins, pocket cards, and report-writing checklists.
- 4) Read twenty cases where both parties used violence, split between ten with a double arrest and ten with a single arrest.
- 5) Listen to five or six 911 tapes from these reports to see if a further pursuit of additional tapes would be helpful to the team's analysis.
- 6) Read an additional number of reports to fully identify how these cases are being handled. What is that number? We advise Team #1 and any text analysis team to read in batches of ten to twenty until it finds that it is not getting any new insights or information from the reports.
- 7) After reading these reports and listening to these tapes, determine the questions and problems that the text analysis raises. For example, the team might decide that its initial investigation was too narrow and should have had a broader focus: "Are we treating victims of ongoing abuse who use some level of force in return the same as batterers, and with what implications for public safety?" Answering this question requires the team to look beyond the arrest decision and investigate subsequent points of intervention, including prosecution, sentencing, probation, and batterer intervention. It involves a wider array of texts, including prosecution case files, pre-sentence investigation reports, and the batterer intervention intake and curriculum. It leads to consideration of how supervision works within in the police department and how officers account for arrest decisions, as well as the role of the city attorney. Answering this question requires looking at whether and how the institutional response is accountable to victims of ongoing abuse.

### Team 2: Prosecuting cases from a migrant farm community

Team 2 wants to figure out why so few cases from the migrant farm community are being successfully prosecuted. **Caution:** a question like this can be partially answered by a good text analysis team, but

cannot be fully answered without talking with prosecutors, a number of people whose cases were dropped and their advocates (including defense attorneys), and others who have the trust of and connections with the migrant farm community (e.g., a particular public health nurse or parish worker). A good review of key primary texts, however, could go a long way toward answering the question. Team #2 will:

- 1) Read arrest reports for cases involving members of the migrant community, as well as other cases. (*Note:* Throughout the text analysis the team will examine cases involving the migrant community alongside several examples of non-migrant cases.) The team will pay attention to: 1) documentation of information from the 911-call; 2) presence and use of interpreters; 3) interviews conducted at the scene; 4) evidence collected; 5) presence of and statements from witnesses; 6) questions about or attention to the parties' immigration status; and, 7) actions taken to link victims to advocacy. In a rural jurisdiction with relatively few cases, the team might review all cases in a two-year period involving members of the migrant community, and five to ten non-migrant cases in comparison.
- 2) Listen to or read transcripts of 911 tapes to see who made the call, the caller's language, and whether the operator was able to readily communicate with the caller. Pay attention to the use of interpreters within the 911 center or via a language line or similar services. (*Note:* In some communities, 911 recordings are only saved for ninety days. The team may have to wait several months to begin, until the dispatch center collects a number of calls.) After reading arrest reports, the team might select ten migrant cases from where it wants to hear the call, plus a half-dozen or more other domestic calls in comparison.
- 3) Read print-outs of dispatch logs to see how information was relayed (and the content of that information) from the caller to operator to dispatcher to officer.
- 4) Read prosecutors' case file notes to see when (or whether) the victim was interviewed, who was involved in that interview, and the language used and use of interpreters. The team will want to see the length of time between the arrest incident and initial contact with the victim and other parties; and, the attention paid to immigration status.
- 5) Read system-based victim/witness specialist or advocate logs and notes to see whether and how someone had contact with the victim and at what points in case processing. The team will look at who was involved, the nature of the contact (e.g., telephone calls, personal interview, or form letter), and what language was used.

### **Team 3: Supervised visitation**

Team 3 wants to know whether and how its supervised visitation center gives equal regard to the protection of adult victims of abuse and children using the center. Again, questions like these can be partially answered via text analysis, but the most complete answer comes by also talking with adult victims using the center, visitation center staff, and others in the community, such as advocates and judges, with a stake in protecting adult victims and children. This team will:

- 1) Read policies of the supervised visitation center to learn how they direct center staff to conduct interviews in ways that account for battering and to see how policies guide workers to safeguard adult victims and children.
- 2) Examine the center's mission statement to see if equal regard for adult victims and children is part of its stated purpose.
- 3) Read fifteen to twenty intake forms to learn how center staff ask questions to help establish who is at risk and in what ways they are at risk.



- 4) Read eight to twelve case files involving adult victims of battering to see whether documentation and other information related to adult and child safety is included or referenced (e.g., orders for protection and police incident reports), what safeguards for safety of the adult victims and children have been put in place, and how potential safety incidents have been handled.
- 5) Read policies and case files to see how categories of “custodial” and “non-custodial” parent account for risks to adult victims of battering.

#### **Team 4: Court orders**

Team 4 wants to examine enforcement of court orders, including protection orders and no-contact orders issued as a condition of release or probation. Team #4 will:

- 1) Define the types of court orders involved in domestic violence cases in order to see what orders apply under what circumstances.
- 2) Determine the most common ways that non-compliance is reported and follow those trails.
- 3) Read the administrative forms for each type of order to see who can request the order, the process and forms involved, the conditions or relief that can be requested, and the maximum length of the order.
- 4) Read the state laws, agency policies, court rules, and other regulations relating to issuing and enforcing the court orders under review to see who has the authority to enforce them and under what conditions.
- 5) Read agency protocols on enforcement (if they exist) to learn how officers and others (e.g., prosecutors and probation agents) are directed to act on violations.
- 6) Compile a list of cases where orders were not enforced (for each type of order) and select cases to follow and analyze in depth.
- 7) If available, read transcripts of protection order enforcement hearings or revocation hearings for violations of no-contact orders.

*Note:* Any text analysis team has to make decisions about what information is likely to give them the best picture of the question they are examining. Team #4, for example, has to determine what will provide the best picture of how it comes about that orders are issued, but not enforced.

Does the team first need documentation of how often orders are issued, but not enforced? If so, this is a task for an individual, not the team. It requires someone to go through court records and count.

It is a waste of time to look into this problem by analyzing case files if it becomes apparent that 95% of the un-enforced orders are under one judge, prosecutor, or probation officer. In this situation, poor enforcement is more likely to be a behavior of a particular practitioner rather than a systemic problem. However, in remote areas where a single judge, prosecutor, or probation officer handles all the cases, distinguishing between an individual’s idiosyncrasy and a system-wide problem can be difficult. Increasingly, CCRs are establishing interagency data bases such as the one used in Duluth, MN (DAIN, the Domestic Abuse Information Network) to provide just this kind of information.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> DAIN is a Microsoft Access-based database program that assembles the information necessary to track and monitor domestic assault related cases in a coordinated community response. It can evaluate demographic data, number and types of arrests, case processing time, case dispositions, and re-offenses. It helps identify trends and

- 8) Begin with the case files of the agency responsible for initiating enforcement processes. For example, if an arrest triggers enforcement of civil protection orders, the team will examine 15 or so police reports related to protection orders. Once the team has its list of cases to analyze, it will follow examples for each type of order.

There are a number of approaches to reading and analyzing texts. In the next section we break down the primary tasks in analyzing case-specific documents, forms, policies, and case files.

## Analyzing case-specific documents

In this task of text analysis, the work group reads and analyzes a single kind of text, such as police reports, psychological evaluations, parenting assessment forms, or pre-sentence investigation reports to understand: a) how the institution has organized workers to act on the case; b) how the action taken at this point of intervention influences the problem the group is investigating; and, c) how this worker's action is shaped by previous workers' interventions, and how it shapes subsequent interventions in the case.

### Try this: Reading a report

Before reading further, try an exercise in text analysis.

Appendix K includes a police report. Using a yellow highlighter and a blank piece of paper, do the following:

- 1) Read the police report and highlight any time you see the officer document information that would help a prosecutor decide if either party was acting in self-defense.
- 2) Write down anything you wish the officer had noted, asked, or done to help determine if either party was acting in self-defense.
- 3) Report your findings to an imaginary CCR committee.

Now, picture a team of four to eight people doing this kind of reading and reporting back to the group. There you have it: text analysis!

As the text analysis coordinator, part of your role will be to gather a large number of documents and read through them to find three to five examples that raise different issues. The team will then read this sample together and talk about what the documents tell them. They will generate an initial list of items to watch for as members read more examples on their own. This list will grow as new reports, forms, or other documents suggest new aspects for investigation.



### Appendices C-H

The Appendices provide starting points for analysis of 911 transcripts, police reports, and victim information packets. For other kinds of documents, the team will have to start from scratch by generating a list of what to look for in the documents. **Important:** the documents themselves must be consulted to do this. You cannot simply decide ahead of time what you want to look for and leave it at that. For example, read several police reports and watch what emerges from the group's discussion. Team members might

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determine policy or procedure changes. For information, contact the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org).

ask: “How is her mental illness affecting this response?” Or, “How useful was the information from dispatch about the weapons here?” Or, “How did involving child protection affect the woman’s safety; the children’s safety?” The team then decides what to explore further in its analysis.

Once the team is familiar with the documents under analysis and you have decided on the questions you want to ask, i.e., developed a worksheet to guide the team, divide a larger number of documents among the team members and expand the number of texts the team can include in its review. Form work groups of two<sup>10</sup> that will read and analyze the documents assigned to them and report back at a debriefing session. For example:

A six-member team reads five police reports together. The CCR coordinator has selected reports that raise issues about the response when a suspect has left the scene prior to police arrival and about the consideration of predominant aggressor and self-defense in making an arrest decision. Three sub-groups of two then each read and analyze five more reports and bring that information to a team debriefing meeting. One group focuses primarily on the “gone on arrival” reports and the other two read for considerations in arrest decisions. The team uses the same approach to analyze transcripts and tapes of 911 calls, with particular attention to those involving children and third-party callers. Altogether they are able to include twenty police reports and twenty 911 calls in their analysis.

In this approach, the team agrees on a worksheet for readers to use in order to provide some uniformity in how each subgroup looks at the reports. Appendices C-F provide sample worksheets for 911 calls and police reports. Add to them and subtract from them if they omit or include information not relevant to your analysis. As text analysis coordinator you will take the initial steps to adapt them for your CCR, but in the end the whole team must be involved in creating this important worksheet. During the process of reading the first four or five documents together, the team will use your template and adjust it for their use. The samples in the Appendices illustrate the approaches taken by two different communities.

Some community teams will zero in on a specific problem, such as the response to migrant farm workers or homeless women or victims of ongoing abuse who use violence toward their abusers. In these kinds of inquiries you and the team will need to carefully think through how to prepare a worksheet to guide the readers without over-restricting their reading of the reports. In other words, you do not want to bring everyone together to review the documents and then make their task so limited that they cannot raise issues that do not appear on the worksheet. A text analysis worksheet or checklist should be there to make sure everyone is looking for the same thing, but not to restrict team members from noticing something new or unexpected.



### *Constructing text analysis worksheets*

Reading reports together and breaking into subgroups can be particularly helpful in a large-scale project involving multiple points of intervention. While it is essential for the entire team to read three to five reports together, the bulk of the analysis can be completed by the individual work groups and shared in the team debriefing discussions.

You can be flexible in deciding what the small groups will focus on. They might read their assigned reports looking for all of the factors the group decided to include in its worksheet. Or, they might zero in on a few factors as they read. For example, a work group analyzing police reports pays particular

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<sup>10</sup> Whenever possible, give assignments like this in teams of two so that a) they are more likely to do the assignment; b) they are learning to work together in analyzing systemic problems; and, c) you avoid ending up with one person’s analysis. Team members will find out more and dig deeper if they work together rather than alone.

attention to how children were dealt with and documented in the reports, or whether the reports show gaps in statements taken or interviews documented. A pair of team members reading 911 transcripts has the assignment of looking at how officer safety and the safety of those at the scene was determined, documented, and communicated in the call and dispatch action. Reading child custody evaluations, a work group asks: “Who was consulted, under what circumstances, and how was their information objectively documented?”

## Caution!

In general, when your team goes looking for certain things—such as: Did probation officers have adequate input from victims when conducting a pre-sentence investigation?—you want to be sure you also capture things that you were not specifically looking for. Otherwise, the whole exercise becomes documenting what you already suspected. If that were the task, you could simply call a meeting, have everyone generate a list of suspected problems, hire a graduate student to look for examples, count up how frequently each item occurs, and be finished.

Yours is a different task. Naturally, the team will have specific things it is looking for in relation to what it believes are desirable practices, such as a good probable cause determination, a good self-defense investigation, or a solid basis for making a predominant aggressor decision. However, avoid doing your analysis in ways that keep you from discovering what is really happening to produce poor outcomes. (The eight investigative trails will help you here.) If you are consistently finding that the problem is “practitioners need more training,” you are missing the boat. In fact, you are likely missing the whole body of water to put the boat in!



*Texts lead to  
investigation trails*

If you want to understand the issues of children at the scene of a domestic violence incident, you could make the mistake that several of us have already made. We read the report and asked: Were the children present? Did the police interview them? Did the interview seem appropriate with respect to age, trauma, and the child or children’s vulnerability to punishment by one or both parents? Did the officers document any involvement in the incident by the children? These questions reflect current discussions regarding best practices. They are important to read for, but it is also a limited way of reading the reports.

Let the situation speak to you. Imagine the police arrive and arrest the mother, then the father. There are three children under the age of twelve. Now the officers have to find someone to care for the children. Whose job is at midnight in a rural community to figure out who will care for the children? How do police officers decide if using a grandparent is a good idea? What about a family friend or a neighbor? Do the officers ask either parent what to do? How do they decide which parent to ask? What do they do with the information from the parent? Once you imagine the scene from the vantage point of all of the players—children, mother, father, police officer, child protection worker, grandparents—new questions arise.

### Try this: Looking beyond a list

Turn to the 911 transcript in Appendix L, which is a call from a fourteen year-old boy.

- 1) Read the transcript and let the words do the talking. Highlight what catches your ear as you read the transcript.
- 2) Read the transcript again, using the sample text analysis worksheet in Appendix C. Use only the checklist in the left-hand column, items A-H.
- 3) Read the transcript once more, using Appendix C, but use the questions at the top under the heading "As you read."

What questions did each approach raise about the boy's experience and the 911 response? What approach provided the clearest picture of the vulnerability and risk that he and his mother faced? What approach brought forward the most questions for you about who is talking with children about their experiences, and how? About how we are helping mothers talk with their children after an arrest or disturbing call? About how 911 operators help children stay safe during the call?

We recommend using worksheets to help guide a text analysis team, but we also want to make sure we do not miss important questions and insights by focusing too intently on the checklist in front of us. As you will read later in this guide, under tips for constructing worksheets, ***be alert to what cannot be captured on a worksheet.***

## Analyzing forms: the bread-and-butter of administrative texts

When text analysis centers on a single kind of text, it often involves analyzing the form that the text is written on: e.g., a parenting assessment form, a pre-sentence investigation form, an arrest report form, or a jail booking sheet. Forms do much of the organizing and coordinating of institutional action. Every practitioner at every point of intervention in a domestic assault case acts on the basis of one or more forms. Every victim has her or his experience distilled into one or more forms.

Take a few minutes here and return to the pre-sentence investigation reports in Appendix A. Here you see the same kind of case, the same set of circumstances, presented to a judge as a pre-sentence investigation. Notice how the second form (Community B) leads to very different aspects of the situation being available to the court. The two forms represent different assumptions about what the state should consider in sentencing, public safety, and the probation officer's role in informing the court. This is why we say forms are not neutral; they carry assumptions, theories, values, and concepts. If forms are not designed with domestic violence in mind, and if they are not designed with a safety-oriented approach to talking about domestic violence, you can expect poor case outcomes. If forms are not designed with a safety-oriented approach, what looks like a problem with workers' training is instead a broader problem of how the institution has used the form to organize and coordinate its workers to act.

Now, look at two forms used by batterers' programs (Appendix B). These are logs that facilitators use to guide the group members' discussion about the acts of abuse that led to their arrest or to the protection order. Imagine the difference in the conversation that ten men following these two different forms would have. One group would focus on violence as an act of anger, the other on violence as an act of control. One would constrain the conversation to a discussion on managing anger; the other would restrict the conversation to analyzing actions, intents, beliefs, and the effects of his violence on himself, his partner, and the children.

### ***Important: In any setting, watch what the forms are doing.***

We can readily compile a list of the most common forms that shape the criminal legal system's response to battering: the dispatch screen, police report writing form and narrative format, crime victim compensation form, victim's rights notification, jail booking form, jail release form, bail conditions, criminal complaint, and order for protection affidavit. We can make a similar list related to post-separation child custody and visitation: court evaluator's report, court order, and forms for intake, observation, scheduling, case status, abduction risk, incidents during exchange or visitation, termination of services, release of information, non-compliance, telephone contacts, and emergency information. Even reports that seem to be all narrative, such as psychological evaluations, petitions to the court for removal of children, or reports to the court by mental health providers, have a structure that a reader can outline.

In reading a form and talking about it with practitioners who use it, we want to find out how the form links and directs them:

- To an authorized or official course of action via agency rules, policy, and law.
  - Is the form part of prioritizing the case? Does it help screen the case?
  - Does it require certain actions for certain circumstances?
- To categorize the people and situation for case management.

- How are people put into categories for case management?
  - How truly does the category represent the actual situation?
  - Does the use of this category have implications for safety (or another question in your investigation)?
- To make certain factors about the case institutionally visible and actionable.
    - What is made visible by this form?
    - What of significance to safety (or your investigative question) is distorted, obscured, or not visible?
  - To link this worker or the case to subsequent steps in the process, resources, or interventions.
    - Where does this form go after this worker has acted on it?
    - How does this form direct the worker to refer to or consult with others?
  - To link this case to an institutionally acceptable theory, assumption, concept, or ways of talking about the case.
    - What categories, language, and terms are used in this form?
    - What specialized professional training or academic degree does the worker need to be authorized to complete the form?

We want to understand how a form guides and standardizes the actions of practitioners as they carry out laws, policies, and regulations. For example, if a sheriff's department uses "that sheet of paper they give you," as a victim might describe it, to meet mandatory victim notification requirements of the state law, we want to know how it was developed, who keeps the information current, and whether the information is relevant and accurate for all victims of battering.

### **To analyze a form**

- Start with a blank copy of the form. Familiarize yourself with its construction and content.
- Collect a handful of examples of the form as completed in a number of different cases by different practitioners and over different shifts, if applicable. This helps ensure that what you see in the completed form reflects institutional methods and not an isolated or individual practice.
- With the team, generate a list about how this document is used. Who will read it? For what purpose in case processing?
- Develop a worksheet for and with the audit team to use in reading and analyzing examples of the form as it has been filled out.
- Study the form as it has been filled out in order to see what workers are paying attention to, and what they ignore. Read three to five examples together as a team and assign multiple examples to pairs of team members.
- Talk with those who know and use the form, before you go too far down the analysis path. If no one on the team is familiar with how the form is prepared and under what conditions, and what workers intend to accomplish with the form, invite one or two practitioners to meet with the team or a smaller work group and teach them the process of using the form. Alternatively, members of the team could take a few hours to observe a worker fill out the form and ask questions about how she or he determines what information to include and where to find it.

## Analyzing other administrative texts

While forms predominate, a CCR text analysis project may end up looking at other types of administrative texts, such as sentencing matrices, scoring instruments (such as risk assessment tools), or routing slips that move a form or report within and across agencies. The process is not much different from that used in analyzing forms: familiarize yourself with its content and construction, study examples of the completed text, and find out from team members or via interviews how practitioners are organized and coordinated to use it. With matrices or scoring instruments, pay particular attention to how workers are trained to use them and be alert for the concepts and theories behind them. For example, in examining a sentencing matrix, what weight does it give to different factors, such as employment stability, length in the community, and the nature of the crime, in making recommendations to the court for probation, jail time, and other aspects of sentencing? How does it account for domestic violence? How does it position the judge to issue a sentence that puts the safety of the victim and others who may be vulnerable to the defendant's violence, such as children and the victim's family members, at the center?

## Analyzing policies and other regulating texts

Agency policies are the most common types of regulating text that an interagency project will examine. A CCR team, for example, might examine the policies of each participating agency or the policies covering each point of the criminal legal system response. Regardless of the specific focus, all text analysis projects should look at the regulating texts that operate at each relevant point of intervention. You want to understand what workers must do and the boundaries of their discretion and responsibility in screening cases in or out and acting in certain ways. You want to see how policies and rules build safety or the other considerations you are exploring, such as accounting for culture or offender accountability, into the structure of the institutional response. You want to discover the concepts and theories carried by the text.

The following checklist outlines the kinds of questions to ask in investigating how domestic violence-related policies account for victim safety and offender accountability in the criminal legal system response. It will help a text analysis team discover the extent to which its interagency reform work has successfully organized workers to think about and act on cases in ways that centralize safety for victims of battering and support offender accountability within that context.<sup>11</sup> The checklist can readily be adapted for use in other systems, such as the civil case processing and child protective services. By asking *how* the policy addresses each item, we arrive at a deeper understanding of the policy's role in structuring the institutional response.

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<sup>11</sup> Adapted from "Developing Policies and Protocols," Ellen L. Pence and Coral McDonnell, in *Coordinating Community Responses to Domestic Violence: Lessons from Duluth and Beyond*, Melanie Shepard and Ellen L. Pence, Editors, Sage Publications, 1999.



## Safety and Accountability: Domestic Violence Policy Checklist

### 1. Principles

How does this policy...

- 1) Make victim safety central to the standardization and institutional change being implemented by the criminal legal system, including sentencing matrixes, reports, logs, dispatch, etc.?
- 2) Consider and recognize different impacts of interventions depending on immediate life circumstances, aspects of culture, and other experiences and characteristics of victims and offenders?
- 3) Balance the need to standardize institutional response with individualized responses and a victim's autonomy?
- 4) Recognize that most incidents of domestic violence are part of a larger pattern and history of violence?
- 5) Validate victim input regarding potential consequences for confronting the offender and level of danger considerations?
- 6) Facilitate institutional responsibility for holding offenders accountable?
- 7) Encourage a response built on cooperative relationships, particularly with others that intervene in these cases?
- 8) Identify the need for communication links and procedures that ensure consistency between civil and criminal responses?
- 9) Focus on changing the institution, not the victim?

### 2. Procedures and Implementation

How does this policy...

- 1) Make clear what practitioners do and under what circumstances?
- 2) Provide criteria and procedures for making and documenting appropriate levels of response?
- 3) Provide guidelines for sorting cases into appropriate levels of response?
- 4) Describe how to document actions and information in order to decrease reliance on memory and to improve completeness of case information?
- 5) Describe and document what, how, and within what time frame case information is shared, and with whom?
- 6) Link practitioners to those beyond the next worker in the system?
- 7) Reference applicable laws, definitions and authority?

How does the policy account for or recognize...

- 1) The different ways in which violence is used by men and women?
- 2) How victims use violence against their abusers, i.e., battering, self-defense, retaliation, response to battering?

- 3) Victim vulnerability to consequences and retaliation if they participate in confronting and holding the offender accountable?
- 4) An offender's likelihood of battering in future relationships?
- 5) The need to provide mechanisms for documenting the pattern and history of abuse when and wherever possible?
- 6) How legal and institutional categories can both help and hinder an understanding of the case?
- 7) How offenders will circumvent the intent of the policy, and find ways to use the policy against their victim?
- 8) The ways that the policy/response could be used against victims of battering by interveners?
- 9) How different levels of dangerousness and risk require different levels of response?
- 10) How punishment and sanction will impact offenders and victims?
- 11) How rehabilitation and programming can be used against victims?
- 12) How non-intervention will affect offenders and victims?
- 13) How the speed of response impacts victim safety?
- 14) How offenders can use children to control victims?
- 15) The impact of domestic violence on children, and the understanding that critical to the welfare of the children is protection of the adult victim parent?
- 16) The need for effective mechanisms to ensure victim notification, access to victim services, and victim safety planning?

### **3. Monitoring**

How does the policy account for or recognize...

- 1) Mechanisms for tracking practitioner compliance with policy and for recording exceptions?
- 2) Steps to ensure compliance and address non-compliance?
- 3) Provisions to ensure that practitioners (including dispatchers, jailers, bailiffs, support staff, and supervisors) receive continuing education and training and comply with training requirements on an ongoing basis?
- 4) A process of record sharing for external monitoring?

### **Try this: Analyzing a policy**

- 1) Get a copy of your agency's policy or one from another agency that intervenes in domestic violence cases.
- 2) Have three highlighters on hand: yellow, green, and blue.
- 3) Read through the policy and highlight in yellow all of the items listed under "Principles" that you can find.
- 4) Read again and highlight in green the items included under "Procedures and Implementation."
- 5) Read again and highlight in blue the items under "Monitoring."
- 6) What items on the checklist are covered most completely?
- 7) What is missing?
- 8) What policy changes should be considered in order to bring this policy in line with the safety and accountability checklist?

You can give members of your text analysis team a similar assignment. Ask one pair or work group to read the policy and pay attention to #1 and #3 (Principles and Monitoring). Ask someone else to read and highlight #2, Procedures and Implementation. Or, work with the entire team as a group and assign each member to look for five or so items from the checklist. In your discussion, draw out missing elements and problematic practices.

## Analyzing case files

### Try this: Analyzing a case file

Unfortunately, we cannot attach an entire case file to this guide, but you will need one for this exercise. If you work in an agency that provides any direct service to clients, get a copy of one client's case file. If you do not have immediate access to a direct service type of file, ask a member of your interagency working group if you can come to their agency and read through a file. Invite them to work with you and read it together.

As you read the case file:

- 1) Make a list of what is in the file.  
Ask: Where did these documents come from? Why does the agency keep these documents on a client?
- 2) Look at each document.  
Ask: How do workers in the agency use these? How are they prepared to complete or use each document? Does this document go someplace outside of this agency? Where and how?
- 3) Draw a brief map of the processes this client is involved in.  
Ask: What other agencies are involved with this client? Do they have a similar case file? How might another agency's case file for this client differ from yours?

You have started to draw a picture of how workers in this agency are organized and coordinated to respond to someone's experience as *a case*.

Turn to the beginning of Appendix Q. It is constructed from the experience of a woman we will call Rachel. A group of us were reading her child protection file, trying to understand how our collective interventions had failed this family. One member of the team said, "Look at all the cases going on in her life. How could she possibly get anything done?" We mapped each case active at one time in her entire case file and you see the overlay of all six cases in the graphic. Simply writing down what is in a file can be an eye-opener.

A case file consists largely of an individual agency's documentation of its work on a case, combined with case-specific documents pulled from other agencies. The content and organization of an agency's case file—what is included, who is the custodian of the file, where it is kept, and who has access to it and when—may be directed by various regulations, such as state laws and agency policies. A particular agency does not gather everything there is to know on a case, but everything it needs to know on the case. Therefore, a team analyzing case files needs to make some decisions and ask itself, "Should we restrict our analysis of a particular agency's case file or should we pull together files on the same case from multiple intervening agencies to get a bigger picture of what was going on?"

### Case file analysis in action

Here is one example of how to organize and use case file analysis.

#### ➤ The question

The associate director of a county social services agency asked her staff to organize a two-day meeting to do a thorough analysis of several child protection cases involving domestic abuse.

➤ **The team**

The agency gathered a team to read the files. It included the director and associate director of the social services agency, two supervisors, and two social workers, plus two consultants from Praxis.



*Getting organized for text analysis*

➤ **The preparation**

A member of the clerical staff was assigned to redact<sup>12</sup> the names of the family and all the players involved in the case. As she worked with the file she noticed that there were a number of criminal cases and protection orders going on during the two years of CPS involvement. She talked to the project coordinator, who asked one of the case manager supervisors to write to the four criminal court clerks and two protection order clerks, explain what we were doing, and ask for the police reports, protection order petitions, and court minutes in these files. All four sites responded by providing all of these documents within a very short time frame. This material was also redacted. The redactor handed over five hundred pages to the person assigned to be the project coordinator. While redacting the files, she kept notes of anything that stood out to her and provided the coordinator with five pages of bulleted points about the file.



*Appendix I: Organizing case-file text*

The coordinator then made a chronology of events and summarized the three cases in the agency file that were opened over a two-year period. Every page was hand numbered. The file was kept in the same order that the agency uses but the additional documents (e.g., police reports and protection order records) were attached as addendums. Each team member received a copy of the assembled file in a three-ring binder.

The team met for a half-day and discussed how to read the file and how to take notes during each member's individual reading. The coordinator went over the redactor's notes with the team. The team was introduced to the eight methods institutions use to standardize workers actions and asked to take notes with these eight factors—our investigative trails—in mind.



*Texts lead to investigation trails*

➤ **The discussion**

Two weeks later, the team met in a location away from the social services agency: in the woods, with meals served. We hung nine large sheets of paper on the wall, representing each of the eight investigation trails, and the ninth with the letters “TBD” (to be discovered). We all had the task of taking legible notes over the next two days and giving them to the coordinator.

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<sup>12</sup> Redact means to change identifying features, such as names and addresses, and remove Social Security numbers and other information. See *Managing the Information* on p. 64 for suggestions on redacting and preparing text for the team.

We began the analysis by asking each person at the table for their overall impressions of the case after reading the file. The first person to speak said, “How lonely she must have been, and how afraid. I saw nothing in what we did that changed that for her. In fact, in many ways we increased both.” Because he set a certain tone for responding to the question, others followed. After about forty minutes we were left with a huge sense of how disconnected the response was from what Robin Walton (her redacted name) was experiencing and needing. Once that realization was made, agency staff fears that reading the case file would be a “finger-pointing exercise” diminished. The finger had been pointed, but at the intervention itself and not at any person.

One supervisor said, “I counted over 47 people having contact with someone in that family, by us or the police or the courts, and still I don’t think anyone can tell you what was going on with the three children.” We stopped and took time to take up the challenge that his observation raised. We put the three children’s names on a flip chart and asked, “What do we know about what each child is experiencing?” One case manager said, “We don’t; we just know them as generic examples of children exposed to domestic violence. That exposure is enough to say it is neglect. The kids were there, they saw it, they called the police, they ran to the neighbor, they called their grandmother for help. That’s what we know. I guess that’s all we absolutely have to know.”

We wondered if perhaps information about the children was there, but not documented. One of the case managers said, “No it’s not there because look, she [the worker] writes down every time she talks to the children and she says what they talked about: ‘is your dad living at home, does he hurt your mom, what does your mom do?’ She is documenting that the neglect category of failure-to-protect is actively operative in this case. We all do this.” The assistant director injected, “Actually, one document in here does tell us how the children are doing; it’s the foster care reimbursement form. The worker has to record the level of difficulty of the case to determine which foster care payment category we will use. If you look on page 446, that’s the form—and she talks about how each child is doing emotionally. Isn’t it telling that that’s the first time it mattered in the documentation?”

After about forty-five minutes of these random and rather over-arching observations, we took a break and a few of us gathered in a corner and selected four topics for additional discussion. The topics included: 1) The generalized approach of making the woman who was being battered responsible for stopping her partner’s violence while the worker and other interveners played an almost hands-off role, even though it was his violence towards her that provided the basis for the neglect case. 2) The weak ways case workers are connected to other possible interveners. 3) The way workers are organized to talk about the case and talk to family members. 4) Where we could find examples of strength-based practice in the case or missed opportunities to engage in strength-based work.

We took three steps in discussing these topics. First, we generated a list of all the practices we saw occurring related to any of the four topics. Then we put case file page numbers next to each example. Finally, we selected one example and went around the eight investigative trails, asking how this practice was linked to the way child protection is organized by law and regulation, administrative case processing, allocation of resources, and so forth.

### ➤ **The outcome**

Without repeating every detail of a two-day discussion, we can say that the group came to a very in-depth understanding of many key aspects of case processing that were contributing to problematic outcomes for CPS response in domestic violence related cases. The case file analysis also produced a local agenda for change and a series of recommendations for change on state and federal levels. For example, the deputy director agreed to call a meeting of the county attorneys, police chiefs, and probation administrators in the three surrounding jurisdictions. She intends to use this case as a working document to discuss how fragmented approaches by the criminal and

juvenile courts failed to provide protection for these children and their mother. She intends to get buy-in for a small pilot project to test new ways of working across county lines and between criminal and juvenile court to coordinate a more effective response.

This is an example of reading a case file as a team. There were times when we realized we needed to rethink a certain form or practice and pulled case-specific documents such as the risk assessment form and parenting assessment checklist to analyze in more depth at a later date. It was the broad look at the CPS case files and related documents, e.g., police reports, protection order petitions, and structured decision-making tools, that created a picture of what was happening to consistently produce poor outcomes in child protection cases involving domestic violence.

## Strategies

The story we told above is one example of using files as a way of analyzing the source of problems in case processing. In this community it involved large, complex case files. Your text analysis project may or may not involve this volume of documents and this degree of organization and redaction. Regardless of the scope of your project, however, you and your team will develop a plan for reading and analyzing each kind of text in a case file. There is no recipe, but the following strategies and examples provide suggestions on how to proceed.

### Create a unique case file

If you are looking at cases involving multiple agencies intervening in a case, use documents from as many of those agencies as possible. Create a text analysis case file that includes the different texts from different agencies. This will be a unique case file of documents that would not ordinarily be assembled in one place at one time. Using the documents from as many intervening agencies as possible provides a rich source of information and insights for the team to examine the collective intervention of agencies.

If your project includes examining the response to domestic assault cases in the criminal legal system, for example, you might select several cases to follow and assemble a file comprised of 911 dispatch center recordings, patrol officer and detectives' reports, domestic violence supplemental forms, prosecutor's case files, victim impact statements, sentencing hearing transcripts, pre-sentence investigation reports, probation files, and related documents. Because domestic violence is a pattern crime, there may be multiple incidents that have been reported to police. Collecting information on all of the 911, police, court, and advocacy interventions with a particular offender and victim will give a much better picture of what is and is not working in the community's response. Drawing on our story above, Appendix I provides a detailed description of the organization of this kind of unique file around child protective services intervention.

### Divide up the reading

Once the case files have been selected, redacted, and assembled, the audit team will read one or more files or portions of a file together. It can then split into work groups, with each team member responsible for a different aspect of analysis. Here is an example of this approach in practice: a CCR team that wants to learn about the experiences of battered mothers and their children in the process of custody evaluation.

- The coordinator prepares two to five case files for the team to work with. (The material has been redacted by the agencies involved or under the coordinator's direction.) Cover sheets lay out a chronology of events and a table of contents lists the documents in the file and their sources.
- Group 1 reads the files with the assignment of developing and presenting a chart of each person represented in the text, their roles, and their relationships to each other.

- Group 2 reads to highlight when and where workers' actions are driven by one of the eight methods of organizing and coordinating workers (the Investigation Trails).
- Group 3 reads to uncover the use of assumptions, theories, language, categories and concepts that shape how the worker talks about and thinks about the case.
- The team reads for opportunities missed and taken to act in ways that strengthen or centralize victim safety and offender and systems' accountability as intervention goals.
- Team members interview policy makers, supervisors, and line staff involved in custody evaluation cases. The interviews are not about this specific case, but the ways in which similar cases are handled.

Through its readings, the team will be able to have rich discussions about what they find and where and how they see gaps in safety. Team members will be fully prepared to conduct any necessary interviews. The team can pull out themes to explore, as well as be prepared to ask about specific practices and texts, such as a parenting skills evaluation form, risk assessment form, or psychological evaluation.



# Defining the scope of your text analysis project



*Getting organized for text analysis  
Asking questions of text*

When deciding on the scope of your text analysis project, you and your team have four key considerations: 1) the focus of investigation; 2) the time and resources available; 3) access to case files and other texts; and, 4) selecting a sufficient amount of text to analyze.

## Focus of investigation

If your team wants to answer a fairly straightforward question, such as “How are dispatchers handling calls when children are the callers or involved in the incident?” you will select a number of calls with children as the callers and a separate group of calls where children were somehow involved in the incident. After listening to fifteen or so tapes or reading the transcripts, the team will know if reading more will be helpful. If the team continues to gain insight or discover new challenges to dispatchers in these types of calls, then it should select another batch of cases.

If nothing new is coming up after reading nine or ten cases, then the group should ask, “Are there particular kinds of cases we should look for, such as cases where children speak English but one or both of the parents do not?” Now you are looking to examine a specific problem that you know exists, but where you need to get a better picture of how these cases come into the dispatch center and how dispatchers are organized to take the calls.

Remember, dispatchers are your best source of information about how calls involving children are handled and pose safety problems. They can give you a number of suggestions for the kinds of calls to look for. They can even point to calls they have taken where they did not know what to say or do to keep the children safe. Should the child be told to leave the house? Should the child be told to stay on the line? Should the child be told to put his or her father on the line?

The focus of this text analysis project is the dispatch center and how it has set up case processing routines for domestic abuse calls involving children. What directives, training, and advice does the agency give dispatchers for handling these dilemmas? How much of that has been put in writing? Because it is not an investigation of the workers, dispatchers and operators can be seen as co-investigators with the team rather than as the objects of your investigation.

Our example above is fairly simple and limited in focus to a single point of intervention. If we broadened the focus to a total legal process such as processing criminal cases or child welfare proceedings, the variety and number of documents to gather and review would expand considerably. For example, if the team is looking at how each practitioner in the criminal legal system is organized to respond in safe ways to domestic violence cases, it will require a large text gathering process. It will include not only 911 recordings, forms, and policies, but also comparable information and case files from law enforcement, prosecution, the courts, victim services, and probation.

## Time and resources

Whenever a CCR takes on a problem to explore and resolve, it faces the limits of time and resources. Most coordinated community response projects are managed by a part-time person assigned CCR duties as an add-on to their everyday work. Most members of a CCR interagency council or committee such as a text analysis team will likely be very busy and can only devote a few hours every two weeks or so to the process. This means that you and the team have to first consider the focus of your investigation, then carefully think through how many reports, case files, and other texts can be adequately reviewed, and how to do that most efficiently. Can you support a broad inquiry into all facets of legal system intervention in domestic assault? Will a narrower focus on a particular point of intervention, such as 911 response or enforcement of protection orders, be a better fit with the available time and resources? We have included examples of different approaches throughout this guide.



*Asking questions of text: four teams and four approaches  
Case file analysis in action*

## Access

Any member of the public should have access to regulatory and administrative texts. Gaining access to case-specific documents requires administrative cooperation and special actions to comply with confidentiality rules. Teams will find this level of cooperation will vary from agency to agency. You will find suggestions on gaining access to case files and other material later in this guide. Keep in mind that even if you have good access to case processing documents such as 911 tapes, police reports, and intake forms, you will also need to include the related regulating and administrative texts that shape the workers interventions.

## A sufficient sample

How many documents does the team need to read to get accurate picture of what is going on? The answer to this question is there is no answer. At least, there is no simple answer. You need enough examples to see how texts function in the case, what they can tell you about how workers are organized to do their work, the typical practices in this local setting, and how safety (or a related investigative goal) is centralized in case processing routines.

Two guidelines will help you determine a sufficient sample.

- 1) *You are trying to see how certain interventions come about; you are not counting practitioner's actions.* You do not need large numbers of examples, but enough to establish that what you have examined reflects the overall process and not the quirks of one or two individuals. Members of the team or other practitioners you talk with may be able to help you identify what is typical and what is idiosyncratic.<sup>13</sup>
- 2) Whatever step of intervention you are examining is linked to steps that precede that point of intervention and steps that follow. Understanding those links is a crucial piece of the investigation. No text stands alone in institutional case processing. You will need to assemble a sufficient sample of these related texts, in order to understand how the text at the center of your investigation is shaped by those that precede and follow it.

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<sup>13</sup> What is quirky may be what gets a worker in trouble for ignoring institutionally-authorized ways of handling the case.

The following example will make this process of defining the scope, determining a sufficient sample, and launching and conducting a text analysis project more concrete.



### *Getting organized for text analysis*

Your CCR plans to do a new round of police training. It decides on a text analysis project as a way to locate aspects of the current investigation practice that need to be enhanced via training. A text analysis committee is formed that includes an advocate, a police sergeant, a prosecutor, a probation officer, and you, the CCR coordinator and shelter legal advocate. The team agrees that it will spend two afternoons reading police reports and generating a list of the issues to address in the upcoming trainings.

#### 1) **Selecting the Files**

With the help of the police sergeant on the team, you identify and pull the last forty police reports written. After reading them, you select twenty or so to redact and use to begin your analysis. The twenty cover a range of shifts and officers. You eliminate some because they involve an officer who is currently in the midst of a departmental disciplinary action and one high-profile case. You eliminate others because you already have several examples from that shift. Choose some arrest cases, some non-arrest, and some where there have been multiple calls. If you are looking for a specific type of call—e.g., involving children who are injured in the case or victims who are identified a drunk or heavily drinking—then select reports for those kinds of cases.

#### 2) **Redacting the Files**

In consultation with the team, you determine if you need to change the name of the suspects and victims. Some police agencies, for example, will insist on changing the names of suspects, victims, and witnesses in all documents, regardless of whether the incident and arrest reports are considered public information. Others will change only the names of minor children. At a minimum, you change the names of the responding officers and other practitioners, in order to emphasize the importance of focusing on institutional practices and not individuals.<sup>14</sup>

As the coordinator, you make arrangements to redact the text and provide the team with a binder containing copies of the police policies and relevant state laws. You also draft a worksheet that the team will try out, revise, and ultimately use to help guide its analysis.

#### 3) **Asking Questions of the Text**

The team reads five reports together and begins to list problems or questions that come to mind about officers' actions and the investigation process. The team makes adjustments to the worksheet and each team member is assigned five different reports to read. At your next meeting, the team continues its discussion of the problems that members saw in the over twenty cases that they have now read together and individually.

From the reports—from the text—team members identify three problematic practices that they want to know more about:

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<sup>14</sup> While every community determines how extensively it will “redact”—make anonymous—the documents it analyzes, every text analysis project involves some level of redacting. Even in small communities where “everyone knows everyone” and team members are likely to recognize the case and the individuals involved regardless of how thoroughly identifying information has been changed, redaction helps shift attention away from individuals and on to institutional practices. See *Getting organized for text analysis: managing the information* on page 64 for more discussion about redacting decisions and strategies.

- a. In two cases, dual arrests were made when one person clearly seemed to be the predominant aggressor. Reading more dual arrest reports might be called for here.
- b. Neither of the dual arrest reports included any information from the initial 911 call, which might contribute to a predominant aggressor determination. In addition, only two of the twenty reports had specific information from the 911 call; and,
- c. In one report the victim was described as drinking and hostile to the officer; the officer did not take a statement from the victim or document whether or not she was coherent. In the group discussion there was speculation that this happens frequently when victims have been drinking and are either hostile to police or visibly impaired from the drinking.

#### 4) Analyzing the Text

You have three issues to more fully explore before the training: 1) How officers are applying the predominant aggressor policy and how clear the policy actually is; 2) How the use of alcohol by victims (and perhaps suspects, as well) shapes the criminal investigation and victim safety measures; and, 3) How officers are using information from dispatch in making their determinations and how they are documenting that in their reports.

To explore further, you and the team take the following next steps. You read the police policy and see that guidance for how to apply the predominant aggressor criteria is vague, and there is no reference to whether or what kind of information from 911 should be included in the report. You pull, redact, and analyze fifteen or twenty cases where both parties used violence to see how predominant aggressor is established. You listen or prepare transcripts for the 911 calls in these cases to see who calls, what is said, what is relayed from dispatch to the officer, and how that information might relate to making a predominant aggressor decision. The team asks a 911 operator and dispatcher to meet with them and help the team learn more about how they are linked with responding officers and how information about the incident is obtained and relayed. Throughout the text analysis process, **the team keeps reading until it is confident that its conclusions are reliable.**

You are now in a position to talk with the chief about clarifying the predominant aggressor language in the policy, adding policy direction on the role that 911 information should have in the investigation, and developing a one to three-hour training module on these topics.

The team also pulls fifteen to twenty reports in which the victim appeared intoxicated and examines how that impacted the investigation of the assault case. When victims are drunk or drinking, do officers tend to take a different approach to the call? Your team has the right players to discuss this issue. Why would police investigate these cases differently? Team members offer suggestions: the cases do not get prosecuted; drunken victims are irritating to officers; and, supervisors do not turn these reports back to be rewritten. These are all possible explanations that the team will explore further via a few key interviews or discussions. How do the reports address the victim's alcohol use? How do they compare in detail and investigation to reports where the victim was not drunk or drinking? Who reviews the report? Where does it go? What are the implications of current practices for victim safety? If the practice changed, how would that make anyone any safer? What information about the problems we have discovered belongs in the police training? The team will then be able to recommend which part of the solution rests with training, supervision, prosecution practices, and the lack of interventions outside of conviction.

# Getting organized for text analysis

## Roles

Some of the over forty Safety and Accountability Audits conducted since 1998 have examined single points of intervention, such as 911, patrol response, or orders for protection. Some have covered the breadth of criminal legal system intervention, from 911 to sentencing and probation sanctions. Others have examined civil and administrative interventions such as child protective services and supervised visitation. The text included in this range of audits has been similarly diverse in scope and quantity, from a small number of 911 calls or protection order affidavits, to hundreds of police reports and five-hundred-page case files. This experience has helped shape our overall understanding of text analysis, how it can work as a tool for coordinated community response, and the different roles of a text analysis coordinator and team members.<sup>15</sup>

## Text analysis coordinator

Under any scenario, the coordinator has a big role in identifying text and securing agreements with participating agencies and custodians of case files and other records. The coordinator is responsible for the overall structure of the text analysis project. The coordinator schedules meetings, locates and selects case files to present to the team, arranges for text redaction, prepares materials for the audit team, identifies initial themes to explore, drafts worksheets, and facilitates the team's assignments and debriefing discussions. The local coordinator reads a wide sample of text in order to determine what to present to the team for analysis. If it is part of your project's design, the coordinator is the link with Praxis in defining and obtaining technical assistance.

## Team members

The text analysis team will not read the same volume of text as the coordinator, but must see enough in order to understand how it organizes and coordinates workers' actions; how it acts between practitioners and across institutions; and, how it stands in for a person and becomes the official or institutional version of events. Team members will review several forms, reports, or case files together and via individual or work group assignments. The approaches outlined earlier will provide the team with a solid base of text from which to make conclusions about domestic abuse case processing in your community.

## Finding text

Figuring out what text to look at begins with understanding how case processing works at each point of intervention that is the focus of your project and identifying the texts that coordinate workers at each point.

## Case Processing Flow Charts

Develop a case processing flow chart similar to that in Figure 8, included earlier (Texts in action). As you draw and review the case processing steps with your text analysis team, identify the texts that you want to

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<sup>15</sup> Praxis works with partners such as the Battered Women's Justice Project ([www.bwjp.org](http://www.bwjp.org)) to assist communities seeking to analyze their institutional responses to domestic violence. They provide a range of support related to text analysis, including assisting a local coordinator and team to select, redact, analyze, and report their findings.

learn more about. The collective experience of the team members as practitioners will help pinpoint them. Identify the texts involved at each step, sub-step, and intersecting process. You will begin to discover the texts at each point that stand in for the victim and direct the officer, social worker, advocate, or other practitioner.

## **Texts that organize and coordinate a worker**

As you zero in on the points of intervention your text analysis project is likely to explore, return to Figure 1 at the very beginning of the guide (A foundation for text analysis). Identify and list the specific texts that organize each worker's job. Draw on the knowledge that team members contribute in their own role as practitioners, along with conversations with others to fill in missing information. Does a particular text have a bearing on the question or aspect of intervention you are exploring?

## **Interviews**

In planning the text analysis project, talk with those who can provide information about the broad scope of case processing and agency rules and practices. These interviews will lead you to much of the text that you might examine. Depending upon the likely focus of your project, you might interview agency directors, the chief judge, chief of police or sheriff, probation supervisor, district attorney, and shelter director. Ask about the laws, policies, rules, and forms that govern their particular agency or point of intervention. Ask for copies or directions on where to find the material.<sup>16</sup>

Talk with practitioners about the kinds of cases they are seeing that pose different safety problems. Conduct an informal survey to identify difficult cases and possible case files to review.

## **Blank Forms**

Collect a set of blank forms from each CCR agency and practitioner you meet with as you go about your initial planning. Familiarity with the form will help you design a worksheet for the audit team to use in analyzing completed forms.

## **Case Files**

Read one or two agency case files early on in the planning phase in order to become familiar with the content and organization, and identify text to include within the scope of your text analysis project. An agency case file typically includes multiple examples of text, such as a variety of forms, reports, correspondence, and narratives. You may decide to concentrate on three to five complete case files that the audit team will analyze together. You and the team may decide to examine a single kind of text, such as an intake form or report. Or, you may decide to construct a unique text analysis case file, as distinct from a single agency's case file, that includes different texts from different agencies.<sup>17</sup>



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<sup>16</sup> *The Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit Tool Kit* includes guidelines and video demonstrations about conducting interviews.

<sup>17</sup> Access to certain case files may be difficult because of confidentiality concerns or size. Case files in child protection and family court can be particularly challenging to obtain in a text analysis project. This is where solid grounding in an interagency team that includes members from those agencies is important. The next section in the guide provides information on securing access and agreements.

## How much text?

“*But how much text is enough?*” is always among a coordinator’s top questions. Because the focus of text analysis is on how institutions organize and coordinate work, we do not need the kinds of representative samples that research studies might require. We want enough documents to determine that what we see reflects institutional methods, not an isolated or individual practice.

### Important:

Do not use case files or other texts as a tactic to go after an unresponsive agency. While sometimes a necessary strategy in a CCR, it is contrary to the purpose of text analysis and will prevent the kinds of relationships necessary for the kind of interagency work described in this guide.

Depending on the nature and scope of your project and the size of your jurisdiction, a reliable sample of the overall process can usually be accomplished by examining less than thirty examples of a case-specific document, such as pre-sentence investigation reports, psychological evaluations, or police reports. Throughout the guide we have provided various examples of the number of texts that would be sufficient in different settings and approaches. If you decide to read case files, for example, less than half a dozen files might yield all you need. With case files, picking a few substantial examples such as cases the team or others recognize as problem cases, or those you see as raising many questions about intervention, can be far more productive than reading twenty or thirty randomly selected files. Here are general guidelines.

#### 1) **Regulating texts**

Directives, policies, laws, guidelines, and other regulating texts are one-of-a-kind texts. Collect one example of each. Depending on the focus of your project, you may not need to copy every regulating text for each member of the team, but have them available as a reference.

#### 2) **Administrative texts**

Begin by collecting one of each kind of form, template, checklist, protocol, or other administrative text involved at the point of intervention you are interested in. Some administrative texts will be one-of-a-kind documents, such as a checklist or decision-making tree. Others will be completed or produced by workers; treat them as case-specific text.

#### 3) **Case-specific documents**

Case-specific documents are often (but not entirely) administrative texts completed by workers—such as an incident report form, client intake form, or sentencing investigation form—or activated by workers, such as protection order affidavits. Begin with ten examples, or enough that the team can read one or two together and several in pairs or groups. Add another ten examples if the team has not answered its questions to its satisfaction, and so on until you are confident of your conclusions.

#### 4) **Case files**

Begin by reading two or three examples to get a feel for the contents and organization of the case file. Working with your team, decide if you will use cases from a single agency or create a unique case file using documents from different agencies. If working with cases from a single agency, read one case together as a team and provide one case for each pair of team members to read. If you create a unique case file, have at least two examples that the team can work with. If this initial sample does not answer your questions, add cases in increments of one or two at a time.



## Analyzing case files: Strategies

Above all, **stay flexible**. Add to your sample in increments if it seems necessary in order to provide a reliable picture of consistent practices and rule out individual idiosyncrasies among practitioners. As your team is making sense of what it has learned and developing its findings you want a large enough pool to check the findings in one report, case, or example against the others. Keep in mind the two guidelines for determining a sufficient sample:

- 1) You are trying to see how certain interventions come about; you are not counting practitioners' actions.
- 2) Whatever step of intervention you are examining is linked to steps that precede that point of intervention and steps that follow.



## Defining the scope of your text analysis project: A sufficient sample

### Texts to ignore:

Case files can include items that are not relevant to the text analysis project and that can generally be omitted from the material provided to the team. This often includes information related to identification and income. For example:

- Driver's licenses
- Copies of Social Security Cards
- Wage statements and tax forms
- Copies of birth certificates
- "Green cards" and similar documents

Note: Because of the vulnerability that battered immigrant women face around questions of legal status, and the potential for unintended negative consequences related to that status, we advise a text analysis coordinator and team not to collect or copy these documents.

Case files can include items that are sealed by the Court or where access by a CCR text analysis team is otherwise restricted. This might reflect statutory or other rules governing individual privacy or the identity of minors. In gathering samples of text for analysis, the agency holding the files will most likely remove such material before releasing a copy of the file. If the agency provides redacted case files, it might include this restricted text after changing any personal identifying details. More likely, it will omit them because of concern that the information cannot be safely anonymous. For example:

- Psychologist or psychiatrist's report
- Medical records
- Custody evaluation
- Investigator or detective's notes



Some text analysis projects work with restricted text that is provided directly by the person who is the subject of or in possession of the text, such as a woman who offers her medical records and custody evaluation report to the project. In this circumstance, she must be fully informed about and consent to how the material will be used. The records must be fully redacted before release to the team.

## Securing agreements, access, and confidentiality

How readily you can obtain the text the team needs to analyze will depend on the nature and scope of your project, the sensitivity of the material, confidentiality requirements, and the ease with which it can be located and copied. Material in the public domain and widely available such as agency brochures, licensing regulations, and many policies is the easiest to collect. In many jurisdictions, arrest reports, 911 calls, and orders for protection are considered public record. Material involving children, medical records, and family court documents is the most difficult to retrieve. As the coordinator, a key part of your job is to negotiate access to the text that the team will study. The following **strategies** will help that process.

One advantage in a CCR text analysis project is that participating agencies are likely to have protocols or Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) in place that provide a foundation for interagency cooperation and information sharing. This might be sufficient for the text analysis project, or craft an addendum to the existing MOU or other agreement that clarifies access to documents and records during the text analysis project. The following example illustrates the kind of language that such an addendum could include.

### Sample Text Analysis Addendum to CCR MOU

- The Lakeville City Police Department (LCPD) will provide written information and documents to the CCR Text Analysis Project Coordinator that the agency's designee determines: a) are reasonable; b) will not compromise safety of any victims; and, c) are allowed under State Law.
- The CCR Text Analysis Project Coordinator agrees that any documents provided by LCPD that have identifying features of individuals, including officers, will be redacted (made anonymous) before distribution to the text analysis team.
- The CCR Text Analysis Project will use excerpts from LCPD records, but will not identify any person or agency involved with the cases.

Consider using a more detailed MOU and confidentiality agreement with the text analysis team members, particularly with more complex or sensitive material such as child welfare and family court case files. Not every text analysis project will need this kind of agreement or level of detail; the templates can be adapted to a range of circumstances. In an audit involving 911 and police records in a small community, for example, you may not need a written agreement about text analysis, beyond what is in the MOU. The audit team confidentiality agreement, however, may provide a measure of reassurance that the details of calls and cases will not be spread about town. You will find a sample confidentiality agreement at the end of this section that you can adapt to your needs.

Interview the person who acts as the records clerk or custodian (which may or may not be their official title or function). Find out where and how records are filed and maintained, and what kind of time line and process the agency will need to provide the requested case files.

Know your state's open records law, at least in its general terms, and seek clarification about specific limitations that may apply to your text analysis project. You will be better able to address concerns that may come up in negotiating agreements with participating agencies.

Keep in mind that agency policies and state laws governing who sees what records often have provisions for access under research and evaluation types of processes, as well as internal program audits. If you are meeting some reluctance, framing the text analysis project in these terms may help.

Be as specific as possible about the range of case files or other records you are requesting, and how those records will be used in the project. The Text Request Template included in this section illustrates one approach to providing all participating agencies with this information.

## Sample Text Analysis Team Confidentiality Agreement

The Any County CCR Text Analysis Project includes collecting and reviewing records and other documents from CCR partner agencies and individual practitioners. The Text Analysis Team will meet throughout the process to read and discuss the information collected. Efforts will be made to remove personal identifying details from any case files, reports, and other materials to be reviewed (produce a “redacted” record). To ensure the integrity of the process, respect the role of individual practitioners, and protect the privacy of community individuals, team members agree to the following:

- 1) The material collected and distributed to team members is intended only for use in conducting the Text Analysis Project and to inform the team and policy makers on the need for changes in intervention practices.
- 2) Team members will keep any materials containing case information confidential, in a secure location, and will return materials to the Text Analysis Coordinator as requested on designated dates.
- 3) In public presentations, trainings, and other settings outside of the Text Analysis Team meetings, team members will preface the use of specific case examples by noting that names and other personally identifying information for those involved has been changed (redacted). Team members will not use such examples locally without discussing the use of such material with the team.
- 4) Team members will not remove any non-public forms, files, or other records containing personal identifying information, unless specifically agreed upon with the agency holding those files.
- 5) Only the text analysis team can make and release findings. Team members agree to follow agreed-upon processes for releasing information about the text analysis project to agency administrators, the news media, and others.

Text Analysis Team Member Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE RETURN THE SIGNED ORIGINAL TO THE CCR TEXT ANALYSIS PROJECT  
COORDINATOR:

- Name and contact information -

## Sample Text Request Template

### Our County Coordinated Community Response Text Analysis Project

Requested records	How the records will be used
<i>Important: See note below about redacting records</i>	
Time frame: January – June 2004 (or other period that fits available records)	
<b>911 Center</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Key to offense and disposition codes used to classify calls</li> <li>▪ 15 recordings of domestic violence calls and corresponding dispatch slips</li> <li>▪ 15 recordings where children place the call (if that would be the focus of your analysis)</li> </ul>	<p>The Text Analysis Team may listen to some tapes and/or read redacted transcripts of the calls and dispatch records.</p>
<b>City One Police Department</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Patrol:</b> 24 domestic violence case files: 8 for calls resulting in single arrest; 8 no arrest; and 8 dual arrest. Selected by pulling approximately every tenth file in each category.</li> <li>▪ <b>PD Victim Support Unit:</b> 30 domestic violence contact slips, selected by pulling every tenth slip</li> <li>▪ <b>DV Team:</b> 8 complete case files, selected by pulling every third file</li> </ul>	<p>The team will complete an analysis of reports and case files in order to examine the ways in which victim experiences are represented in these records and better understand how policy, training, and interagency linkages are in place. The team may also read and analyze reports and case files.</p> <p>We will also look at multiple calls involving the same parties and will request additional reports once these cases are identified.</p>
<b>City Two Police Department</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 12 domestic violence case files: 4 for calls resulting in single arrest; 4 no arrest; and 4 dual arrest. Selected by pulling approximately every fifth file within each category</li> </ul>	<p>- See City One Police Department -</p>
<b>Our County Sheriff’s Office</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 12 domestic violence case files: 4 for calls resulting in single arrest; 4 no arrest; and 4 dual arrest. Selected by pulling approximately every fifth file within each category</li> </ul>	<p>- See City One Police Department -</p>
<p><i>Complete case file</i> includes, but is not limited to reports, statements, and forms, excluding medical records and photographs.</p>	
<p>Redaction: Per each agency’s Addendum to the CCR Memorandum of Understanding, any records with identifying features of individuals, including officers, will be redacted (made anonymous) prior to analysis by the team, with the exception of 911 recordings. 911 recordings will not be shared outside the team, however, and any transcribed 911 recordings will be redacted. Excerpts from calls and case files may be used in reporting back what we have learned. No personal identifying information for anyone involved in a call or case will be included in excerpts used in reports or presentations about the Text Analysis Project.</p> <p><b>NOTE:</b> Team members have signed a confidentiality agreement that is available for review from [Name], local project coordinator.</p>	
<p>For questions and further information, contact: [Name], Text Analysis Coordinator: [phone #] and [e-mail]</p>	

## Managing the information

Text analysis can leave a project coordinator feeling like an outpost of a photocopy shop. It is where a fair amount of attention to detail and organization will pay off. It is also where keeping the number of case files or other text in check will help. It will be tempting to ask for more and more examples of what you find as you dig into the documents. Remember, however, that you only need enough to determine that what you are seeing reflects institutional methods, not an isolated or individual practice, and to see how the problem you are seeing is related to how workers are coordinated to do their work.

Before making any decisions about which text and how many to request, redact, and provide to the team, read through several agency case files to become familiar with its content and structure.

### Redacting text

The term *redact* is a legal term meaning to make documents unidentifiable to a specific person or place. In a text analysis project, masking the identities of the people involved (victims, suspects, children, and practitioners) helps take our focus off of individuals and shift it to institutional practices, even in small communities where practitioners and cases may be well known to team members. Redacting text also helps respect people's experiences and confidentiality. **Every text analysis project involves some level of redacting.**

Every community will determine the extent to which identifying information in case files and reports will be redacted. In documents that are considered public record and available on request to anyone who asks or looks them up at the courthouse, you may decide to change only the case numbers and names of the people involved. Or, you may find that the participating agencies are more comfortable with a more thorough degree of redaction that includes dates, addresses, license plate and driver's license numbers, and squad car or unit numbers. Or, that rules and regulations governing court records and other documents require a thorough redaction. The police department or prosecutor may insist that identifying information for officers, victims, suspects, and witnesses be changed, along with addresses and case file numbers. State law may restrict the release of identifying information for juveniles. Social Security numbers should always be removed.

There are **circumstances where the text material must always be carefully and thoroughly redacted.** These include: material that the team works with as a group, material that identifies juveniles, and all examples or quotes from the text that will be used in findings, reports, and any other kind of public forum or presentation. If in doubt, err on the side of redacting the material.

Redaction can be time-consuming and costly, particularly if it involves large volumes of text or case files. In this situation, you might decide to have some team members work in pairs or a small group to read un-redacted files on site, such as in the prosecutor's office or child welfare agency. The team members assigned would give each case a temporary number, such as A-1 and so on, and take notes on a worksheet, but without including identifying details for the parties involved, whether members of the public or practitioners. The smaller work groups could then contribute their analysis and notes for multiple examples of the texts, without the need to redact it. The on-site groups would also select a sample of reports or files for the team to read as a whole. That text, in turn, would be thoroughly redacted before the team as a whole worked with it.

Appendix J is a checklist of items to consider in deciding what degree of redacting you will do with the forms, reports, case files, and other text involved in your project.

## Preparing text for the team

Team members need text that is reader-friendly. Formats and reproductions should be easy to reference and read. Pages should be numbered sequentially and where possible the individual lines of text should be numbered, which is more likely with report narratives and transcripts. The Appendices contain several examples of texts that have been redacted and prepared for a team. If team members will be analyzing text individually or in working in groups and returning later for a team discussion, provide clear instructions and worksheets to guide their assignments.

Organize large case files in three-ring binders, with tabs separating different dates, sections, or types of text, as appropriate to what you are exploring. This is particularly helpful if you have created a unique case file that includes different texts from different intervening agencies. Where material is arranged out of sequence, provide a chronology of actions taken in the case.



### *Appendix I: Organizing case-file text*

If you want to retain the chronological order of the original file, insert tabs for different kinds of text such as intake forms, orders for protection, and police reports. If you will be asking different team members to focus on different pieces of the file, consider color-coding the corresponding types of text. For example, if you are reviewing prosecution files and one work group will look at the initial patrol officer's report, another at the domestic violence unit's supplemental form, and another at the criminal complaint drafted by the prosecutor, make each of these documents its own color.

## Constructing text analysis worksheets

Worksheets guide the team's reading and provide reminders to pay attention to the investigation trails, the methods of organizing and coordinating work, as well as the presence or absence of different practices and anything that makes people more vulnerable and impedes safety. Worksheets provide a structure for the activities of text analysis, and a means of documenting what team members read and see in the text.

The following page includes suggestions for a text analysis coordinator to consider in constructing and using worksheets. You will involve the team in the process as well, but getting it started and settling on a final format are up to you. In addition to these tips, the Appendices include examples of worksheets that you can use as templates in developing your own. Stay flexible in how you use them. You and your team might decide that not every member has to read for every aspect of 911-response, for example, or read every item in a prosecutor's case file. As described previously in this guide, asking team members or small work groups to zero in on a few questions or kinds of text might be how you use the worksheets.



### *Asking questions of texts*

## Constructing and using text analysis worksheets

### 1) *Know the text*

In order to construct a useful worksheet you have to know the text you are asking the team to analyze. Read several police reports or intake forms, listen to multiple 911 calls, or read several agency case files in detail. Take notes. What does this text do? How does it direct the worker? What will you pay attention to or ignore?

2) ***Identify preliminary themes or “codes”***

These will begin to emerge as you study several examples of the text in question. Are you covering a broad range of practices, or zeroing in on four or five key aspects of safety or related investigative question? Remember to put yourself in the scenario from everyone’s perspective. What is missing, obscured, or marginalized, and from whose vantage point?

3) ***Keep the worksheet readable and workable.***

Keep the worksheet to one or two pages and in a readable font (no smaller than 10-point). Provide space for notes, as well as checkboxes if appropriate.

4) ***Try out an early draft with the team, and be prepared to revise.***

Try out a draft with the team or a workgroup. Can they navigate through the worksheet without confusion? Are the categories and terms clear? Is there duplication that can be eliminated? Anything to add?

5) ***Provide instructions and demonstrate the practice of text analysis.***

Provide clear instructions to the team, both via demonstration and in writing if they will be working on their own in subgroups. Ask questions of the text and the team. What is this form or file about? What does it do in the case? How does a worker fill it out or construct it? Where does it go next? As a coordinator, the better you know the text the more readily these questions will come.

6) ***Include cues to the investigation trails and aspects of risk and safety.***

Help the audit team remember to look for how the text leads to seeing the methods of organizing and coordinating practitioners’ work; and, how it raises questions of vulnerability and safety. These cues can be included at the top of a form as a box or header.

7) ***Be alert to what cannot be captured on a worksheet.***

A worksheet or checklist cannot stand alone. Like any form, it includes some things and omits others; it directs the user in certain directions. Worksheets are good at helping us measure what we see against a standard good practice. They are not always so good at helping us get deeper into understanding what kinds of gaps exist, and for whom.

## Try this: Using text analysis worksheets

### Exercise A:

- 1) Locate the worksheets in Appendices C-D or E-F (pick one set).
- 2) Have a set of highlighters handy.
- 3) Using the worksheets, read the 911 transcript and related police report in Appendix K and take notes. Use the highlighters to locate points in the text that raise questions for you.
- 4) What questions does the text raise about 911 and patrol practices?  
What gaps in safety do you see, and for whom?  
What would you report back to your team in a debriefing session?  
Where would you want to investigate further with your interagency team?

### Exercise B:

- 1) Pick one of the 911 worksheets to use (Appendix C or E).
- 2) Read the two 911 transcripts in the Appendices (K or L), using the worksheet.
- 3) What questions does the text raise about 911 practices?  
What gaps in safety do you see, and for whom?  
What would you report back to your team in a debriefing session?  
Where would you want to investigate further with your interagency team?

## Using a database

When it comes time to gather up what you have learned in your text analysis, share it with others, and incorporate it into findings and recommendations, you will appreciate the front-end attention you have paid to how and where you record your analysis. For many interagency text analysis projects, careful notes from each discussion and debriefing session will be sufficient. If you are looking at multiple systems or larger numbers of documents and types of texts, you might need to consider other ways of organizing the information. While you can use spreadsheets or word processing tables constructed around your themes or questions, using some kind of electronic database will provide more flexibility in reporting your findings and using excerpts to illustrate them.

A program like Microsoft Access, for example, is widely available on many computers and can be a good tool for a CCR text analysis project, which is not a large-scale, formal research project where specific kinds of social science software would be more appropriate. Appendix O illustrates the construction of this kind of database. It consists of the fields and data types used for a text analysis project involving information collected via the 911-call worksheet in Appendix C.

Whatever database or recording tool you use, as you enter information from your analysis, **avoid paraphrasing the text**. Use the exact words that appear in the forms, reports, or case files. You want to understand how the text presents, shapes, and describes, not substitute your own words or filter it through your own professional discourse. We are not looking for “meaning” in the text, but how the text makes meaning of events.



# Using what you learn: findings and recommendations

From the initial planning onward, the design of a text analysis project anticipates reporting its discoveries and putting them to use. You and your team have been answering two key questions about the point or process of intervention you selected as your focus: 1) How are workers organized and coordinated to respond to domestic assault cases? and 2) How does that response produce gaps in safety for victims of battering? In making sense of what you have learned, you add a third question: How do we close those gaps?

The text analysis process itself, with its emphasis on how practices come about—the 8 Investigation Trails—points the way to solutions. Drawing on our Safety Audit work, we have identified a process that an interagency text analysis team can use to shape findings.

## Shaping your findings – a guide for text analysis debriefing discussions

### 1) Describe your impressions of the texts

What were your immediate impressions when you read this text? What surprised you? What made you stop and wonder about a practice or step in case processing? How does this practitioner intervene at this point? How does the form, file, or document act in the case? How does it represent the person's real experience?

### 2) Make problem statements – identify the gaps

What did you see in this text that makes conditions less safe for victims of battering? Where is the gap? Be concrete and express it as a problem. Different team members will see different problems in what others are describing.

### 3) Articulate how the finding is a problem

For which victims of battering is this a problem, and how? Who is at risk? How is it a problem of safety? How is it a problem of accountability?

### 4) Review the evidence

Do you need more information? Do you need to talk with someone in order to better understand what happens at this point of case processing? Do you need to locate and analyze additional texts?

### 5) Locate the sources of the problem

What contributes to the gap? How is this problem anchored in the ways in which work is organized and coordinated for intervening practitioners? Which of the 8 Investigation Trails lead to the problem? Do you see any of the 12 Features of Institutions contributing to the problem?

#### Keep in sight:

- Rules and regulations
- Administrative practices
- Resources
- Concepts and theories
- Linkages
- Mission, purpose, and function
- Accountability
- Education and training
- Any new methods of standardizing workers' actions?
- The 12 Features of Institutions

6) **Offer solutions**

Locate possible solutions to the problems you have discovered. How might you close a particular gap through a change in rules, policies, linkages, resources, or training? Does the problem you have found require new concepts and thinking, or a “paradigm shift” to solve it?



*How to use this guide  
Texts lead to investigation trails  
Going deeper: 12 features of institutions  
Appendices M & N*

In debriefing meetings, the team brings together its diverse perspectives and findings in order to articulate the nature and sources of problems. This interagency approach is one of the strengths of the text analysis method outlined in this guide, as well as strength of the coordinated community response approach. Appendix N is a worksheet that team members can use to prepare for debriefing discussions about text analysis findings. Whoever is charged with writing the report may find it helpful to have these worksheets on hand, along with a good set of notes for each team discussion.

In moving toward a final set of findings and recommendations, your team will go through this debriefing process several times, reviewing and refining your conclusions. What may at first seem like solid findings may be removed or rewritten as the team discusses them and articulates the evidence. In some instances, team members may disagree about a particular finding and together you will decide to either set it aside or perhaps present it as a question that requires further investigation.

The format that your final report takes will be influenced by the focus of your text analysis project, the initial planning and agreements with the CCR or other interagency partnerships, and the requirements of any funding bodies that have supported the project. It might be a longer written report, with a statement of the method, the texts involved, and an account of your recommendations for change and implementation. It might be a presentation to the full CCR or a community forum, with a brief summary page of key findings and slide presentation. It might involve all of these approaches.

Regardless of the specific medium you select for reporting back, keep two key points in mind: 1) Involve the team; the findings should be clearly presented as the work of a collaborative effort; and, 2) Use the process outlined in this section to articulate your findings and recommendations. Organizing and presenting your findings with these two factors at the center will help anchor a foundation for change in an interagency response, backed by clear problem statements and evidence.

**Caution!**

One team member's opinion or single example in a report is not a finding. As a text analysis project coordinator, part of your job is to emphasize throughout the process that *only the team can make findings, after careful reading, discussion, evidence, and agreement.*

As you begin to conclude your analysis and identify gaps and recommendations, emphasize that they are preliminary findings. The coordinator and members of the team should meet with administrators in the agencies that will be most affected by your recommendations. Let them know what you have learned and the conclusions you have reached. Provide them with an opportunity to ask questions about the process and the evidence. Involve them in any official announcement of the project's findings, if that is part of its design, such as an interagency task force meeting, community forum, or press conference.

Appendix M is an excerpt from a final report that was developed using the process outlined above. The findings were drawn primarily from text analysis of victim information packets and law enforcement patrol reports. In addition to a written report, this community convened a community forum involving representatives from all of the participating agencies, plus others involved in its “task force” or coordinated community response. Each problem statement provides the foundation for an implementation committee or work group to clearly see the gap, what contributes to it, how to close it, the areas of likely change, and who should be involved in crafting that change.

The following outline provides a template for organizing a written report of a text analysis project.

- 1) Describe the background and approach of the text analysis project; include:
  - a. Reasons for using text analysis as an interagency tool
  - b. Participating agencies and text analysis team members from each agency
  - c. Funding and local support
- 2) Describe the method and scope; include:
  - a. Reasons for focusing on these agencies and steps in case processing
  - b. Organization of the team and work groups
  - c. Number and type of texts included in the analysis
  - d. Debriefing process and number of team meetings
- 3) Present the text analysis team’s findings and recommendations
  - a. Group problems around themes
  - b. For each gap/problem, describe and document:
    - i. The gap/problem
    - ii. How it is a problem and for whom
    - iii. How the problem is produced; the institutional practices involved
    - iv. How to close the gap/solve the problem, and who should be involved
  - c. Provide specific examples from the text (with redaction notice) to illustrate each problem
- 4) Articulate next steps
  - a. How the Coordinated Community Response or interagency task force will proceed
  - b. Questions raised by the text analysis that require further exploration
  - c. What the team would like to have explored, but could not (and the limitations)
- 5) Throughout the writing, keep in focus:
  - a. Specific institutional practices: How is work organized and coordinated to produce problematic outcomes in domestic violence cases?
  - b. The dimensions and complexities of risk and safety
  - c. The many identities of victims of battering
  - d. The many aspects of accountability