
HOW TO DOCUMENT WORKPLACE ABUSE (WITHOUT MAKING THINGS WORSE)

**A Safety-First Guide to Protecting
Yourself While You Figure Things Out**



why this guide exists

People are often told “Document everything.”

But no one explains **how** to document safely, **why** having a timeline can be so important, or **when** documentation can actually increase risk.

This guide exists to help you:

- Preserve information
- Protect your credibility
- Avoid common documentation mistakes
- Stay in control of your narrative
- Understand how and when records are used

You do not need to:

- Report to HR
- Confront anyone
- Decide your next step

Documentation is not a commitment.

Documentation can help **protect your mental health.**

Documentation is one option — one you have full control over.

what documentation *is* (and is not)

Documentation is:

- A private record of **patterns** to remind yourself you're **not imagining things**
- Succinct, factual, boring, and **unemotional**
- Written objectively **objectively** for a neutral / third party audience
- Stored **safely** and quietly, not on a work device

Documentation is NOT:

- Venting or complaining subjectively
- Journaling emotions (helpful to save that for personal support)
- Emailing accusations
- Copying HR “just in case”
- Proof you must immediately use

Good documentation doesn't escalate.

It **creates leverage** you may never need to use.

EXPLORE MORE

[Building Evidence: How To Document Workplace Abuse](#)

[How Can You Document Hostile Conduct at Work to Build a Strong Legal Case?](#)

when to start (and when to pause)

Consider **starting** documentation when:

- Something feels “off,” but you can’t quite explain why.
- Your memory is feeling shaky or being questioned.
- Expectations keep changing, with or without communication.
- Feedback suddenly turns vague or personal.
- You feel anxious before specific meetings or with certain people individually.
- You have access to an offline or cloud-based tool that’s not housed on company equipment.

Consider **pausing or limiting** documentation if:

- You fear your devices are being monitored.
- You’re already under investigation or a PIP.
- Writing things down increases your distress.
- Retaliation feels imminent.

You can always document **later**.

Your **safety** and health always come **first**.

what to write (facts that hold weight)

When you document, focus on observable facts:

- Dates and times
- Who was present
- What was said or done (exact words if possible)
- How it affected your work
- Any follow-up or witnesses
- Any company policies not being followed

Think like a **security camera** — not a narrator.

From a bird's eye view, report details **without emotion or bias**.

Examples (neutral):

“On March 4, during the team meeting, the manager stated, ‘You are not reliable,’ after I asked for clarification on the deadline. No prior performance concerns had been raised. The comment ended the discussion.”

“On October 11, my supervisor accused me during a one-on-one meeting of deleting files I did not touch. When I explained that, he stated, ‘I know you did regardless of what you say.’”

Facts are far stronger than emotional language — even when harm is real.

what not to write (and why)

Avoid documenting:

- Assumptions about intent (“They were trying to sabotage me”)
- Diagnoses (“This is narcissistic abuse”)
- Emotional reactions in work records
- Speculation about possible motives
- Long, drawn out narratives

These can be:

- Dismissed as “subjective” or unfactual
- Reframed in a case or action plan against you
- Used to question your professionalism, health status, or ability to maintain employment with the organization

Your **feelings are valid** — just store them safely and separately.

Working with a trauma-informed therapist to help process emotional bullying and abuse can help bring clarity and confidence when reporting facts.

EXPLORE MORE

[End Workplace Abuse Resources](#)

how to log incident neutrally (template)

Date:

Time:

Location / Platform:

People present:

What happened (facts only):

(What was said or done — word-for-word if possible)

Impact on work:

(e.g., task delayed, meeting derailed, access blocked)

Follow-up / evidence:

(email, chat message, document, witness)

Private notes (optional, not for sharing):

You can document:

- Briefly
- Inconsistently
- Imperfectly

Consistency helps. Perfection is not required.

TEMPLATES

[End Workplace Abuse template \(copy this Google document into your personal Google Drive.\)](#)

[Another template for documenting incidents of bullying, harassment, and/or discrimination](#)

where to store documentation safely

Safer storage options:

- **Personal cloud** account (not work-linked)
- **Personal device**, not employer-issued
- **Encrypted notes** or password-protected files
- Handwritten notes kept **off-site**

Avoid:

- Work email drafts
- Work laptops or phones
- Shared folders
- Company note-taking apps
- Discussing extensively with colleagues who may inadvertently (or intentionally) disclose trusted information.

If you ever leave your job suddenly, you should still have **access** to your records.

If you consult an attorney, you do not want any of your documents compromised.

If utilizing Employee Assistance programs, be **mindful** when sharing or discussing workplace abuse or wrongdoings.

HR, retaliation, + recording

HR

HR's role is to protect the organization by mitigating risk and preserving reputation. Sometimes that aligns with employee safety. Often, it does not.

Documentation helps *you* decide:

- If and when to involve HR
- What you're comfortable sharing
- Whether patterns exist

RETALIATION

Retaliation is common after reporting — especially subtle forms:

- Increased scrutiny
- Isolation
- Gaslighting
- Sudden performance issues
- Escalation to Human Resources (HR)

It is why documentation should stay **private** until you decide otherwise.

RECORDING CONVERSATIONS

State laws vary by location.

Before recording audio or video, understand consent rules where you live.

This guide does not recommend recording without legal clarity.

[Reporter's Recording Guide](#)

if you're afraid to document

That fear is **meaningful and something to pay attention to**.
Be sure to unpack the negative and heavy emotions in a trusted space.

You might choose to:

- Outline only dates and names to start.
- Keep notes minimal and organized, filling in gaps at a later time
- Wait until you're feeling safer or more grounded
- Focus on medical or emotional support as the priority

There is no "right" timeline. Do the best you can — and remember to give yourself grace and compassion throughout the process.

Documentation is a **tool** — not a requirement for legitimacy.

Remember, written processing of an event can also serve as a form of **healing**.

closing: you're allowed to go slowly

In fact, going slowly is often the fastest route to resolution.

Give yourself permission to **pause** at any time.

Many people don't end up using their documentation at all but can maneuver the realities of their situation with more **clarity** as a result of writing things down.

Knowing documentation exists can:

- Restore a sense of **control**
- Reduce self-doubt
- Interrupt gaslighting
- Help you **trust your memory** again
- Reflect the next best steps

You don't owe anyone your records.

You don't owe anyone an explanation.

You **owe yourself** a fighting chance.

You are allowed to **protect yourself quietly** while you focus on recovery.

You don't have to navigate this alone — and you don't have to rush.

If this guide helped you feel a little steadier, additional resources are available at

[End Workplace Abuse.](#)