

# Responding to scenarios

The **scenario response** is a common assessment task for students in health sciences and community and social welfare subjects. These are required in exams and as stand-alone written assessments. Scenario responses are similar to answering **short answer questions** in so far as responses should be succinct, clear and direct. But there are differences. Scenario responses often require a statement of one's *observations*, *personal feelings* and *recommendations*, e.g., from the perspective of a counsellor or healthcare worker. Unlike many short answer question tasks, responses are written in response to a case study or "scenario". It is important therefore that the response is directed specifically to the "case" and not to wider issues that might arise from it (unless explicitly called for).

## Example 1

The following case study is purely fictional and does not depict any actual person or event.

*The client visits the youth agency where you work. She has made the counselling appointment after being referred from Centrelink. She appears nervous and lacks concentration, although she answers questions appropriately. She is dressed in casual clothes that are loose-fitting and creased. You take her details and find her difficult to engage at first. After you have been chatting for a while, she talks more freely. The client tells you that she is 19 years old and left high school four years ago. She has been unemployed for just over a year. When she first left school, she worked in a fast-food outlet as a cashier. This provided enough money to live reasonably well, and she moved out of home when she was 17 years old. Not long after this, her hours at work were cut back. She states she needs a job and will do anything that is available. Her boyfriend is also unemployed, and they are at risk of losing their unit they rent, due to being in arrears with the rental payments. When the client sees you have noticed old bruising on her legs and arms, she gives a hasty explanation about falling on the dance floor while clubbing.*

- a) **Question:** What is your initial impression of the client and what information will you collect, record and report? (3 Marks)
- b) **Question:** What can you do to support the client, and will you suggest that she requires ongoing counselling sessions? (3 Marks)

## How to approach the task

1. First read the questions and note the relative mark allocations. Your responses should be roughly proportionate to the weighting of marks given. If there was an unequal weighting (e.g., 3 and 15), more detail would need to be provided in response to the second question. If there is equal mark weighting, only respond in as much detail as needed to answer any given question. Don't waffle or "pad out" your response.
2. Note the **nouns/noun phrases** in terms of the information you are directed to provide. In this example, the directions are for "initial impressions", "information", the "support" provided, and your "suggestions" re: ongoing counselling. Circling these words will help you avoid going off track in your response.
3. Note the context of the information required. Question a), for example, is all about the *client* and what is *collected*, *recorded* and *reported*. Question b) is about *client support* and suggestions in relation to *counselling sessions*. It's not about other things, e.g., other support services she might have access to. Underline these things to help you avoid going off track in your response.
4. Now read the case scenario. Underline or highlight elements that relate to the a) information you are directed to provide, and b) the context of the case. You might consider making a table as follows (under exam conditions make a mental note).

### Notes in response to scenario

	Information needed	The scenario context	Notes from case
First question	Initial impressions	➤ <i>of the client</i>	➤ [note your impressions here]
	Information	➤ collected and recorded ➤ reported	➤ [note information needed here]
Second question	Support needed	➤ <i>for the client</i>	➤ [note support required here]
	Suggestions	➤ <i>in relation to the client</i>	➤ [make suggestions here]

## Start your response

Directly address what you have to do (see **bold** in Example 2 below). As you are responding to a particular scenario, no introductions are needed. Use direct language such as: “*My impression of the client is that... / “What made an impression regarding the client was the ... etc.”* List your notes about the case, beginning with the most important to the least important (see *italics* below). Next respond to what *information* needs to be collected, reported and recorded (see *italics* below). Where possible, use the language in the question in your response (“impression” “report” etc.).

Follow the same process for the second question. The response should be like an inverted triangle: moving from the answer in general to the specific details backing up your answer.

### Example 2

- Observations / impressions about the client
- Information about client that should be collected, reported and recorded
- Support
- Suggestions made
- My initial **impression** of the client is that she *is facing financial difficulty*, she is *currently unemployed* and is *in arrears with the rental payments*. I also suspect that she may have been involved in a *physically abusive situation*, possibly a *victim of domestic violence*. I would **report my observations** - I would **note** down that she has been *unemployed for over a year, that she is behind on rent, she is currently living with her boyfriend who is also unemployed*. I would also **note** down that I saw *old bruising on her legs and arms* and the way *she reacted* when I asked her about them. Initially I would want to know *why the client felt the need to see a counsellor* rather than an *employment service*. I would then need to **ask further questions to collect more information** about *her current relationship* and to find out where *her bruising* has come from. I would be **wanting to know** more about how she has *spent her time* the past year whilst being unemployed and how *she has coped* with that. I would also want to know why she *left home at 17*, if there are *any issues that she was escaping* or not. I would also want to **find out more information** about *her current housing circumstances* in order to assess more accurately if housing will become an issue soon - how far back *in arrears* are they? I would **note a record** of the following:
    - A *referral pathway* from Centrelink
    - The *date and time*
    - The client's *full name and DOB*
    - Details of the *presenting issues and any information provided* by the client
    - If I *organise a referral* to an employment provider, I would make note of that and the *agreement she has made to have an appointment* with them.
    - And finally, any *issues or topics to be covered next week*
  - The client needs **support** from an *employment service* to help her to *gain employment* and be able to remain in *stable housing*. I would **connect** her with an *employment provider*. I would then **suggest** that the client *continues counselling sessions* to address any issues that she is currently facing, and to *gain a stronger rapport* in order for her to *feel that she can open up to me about the bruising on her legs and arms*. The client may **need support** in *acknowledging harm* being caused to her and **further support** in *dealing with that* when the time comes.

### Other helpsheets available

- Short Answer Questions