PROVA WORKSHEETS

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Is This Record Fair to Me?

A ten-minute check of one entry, and what to do about what you find

FOR:
anyone reading a record a service holds about them, and anyone helping them read it

INCLUDES:
ten questions to answer about one entry, a way to read your answers, and the next step each kind of problem points to

Is This Record Fair to Me?

A record can be wrong in more than one way. A date can be wrong. An event can be left out. An opinion can be written as if it were a fact. A label can stick long after it stopped being true. This check helps you work out which of these, if any, applies to the entry in front of you, so that what you ask for next is specific.

It is a reading aid, not a legal test. A record that passes every question can still be one you are entitled to question, and a “no” answer does not guarantee that a holder must change anything. What it must do depends on the law and policy that apply to that record.

01 How to use it

Choose **one entry**: a single case note, an assessment, a flag, a form or a decision letter. If an entry is long, take one paragraph at a time. Have the whole record nearby, because some questions ask what else it says.

For each question, mark **Yes**, **No** or **Not sure**, and write a few words about why. “Not sure” is a useful answer. It usually means there is something to ask the holder about.

Allow about ten minutes per entry. If an entry is upsetting, stop and come back to it, or go through it with someone you trust.

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02 The ten questions

Is it right?

1. Are the plain facts correct? Names, dates, addresses, places, ages, household members, amounts, and what happened in what order. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

2. Is it about you, and only you? Entries sometimes mix up people with similar names, or record a family member's circumstances as yours. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

3. Is it still true? Something accurate when it was written may no longer be accurate. Examples include an old address, a diagnosis that was later revised, a debt since repaid, or a risk flag from a situation that has ended. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

Is it whole?

4. Does it include what you told them? If you gave a reason, an explanation or a document at the time, is it there? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

5. Does it leave out something that changes the meaning? "Missed appointment" reads differently when the letter went to the wrong address, the bus did not run, or the appointment clashed with a hospital stay. A record does not have to say everything. It does need to include what a fair reader would need to understand it. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

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Is it fair in how it is written?

6. Can you tell fact from opinion? “Did not attend on 4 May” is a fact you can check. “Appeared uncooperative” is someone’s view. Opinions can belong in a record, but they should read as opinions, ideally with who held them and what they were based on. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

7. Can you tell where each piece of information came from? Did you say it, did staff see it, or did someone else report it? A neighbor’s claim written as a finding is a different thing from a finding. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

8. Are the words ones a fair reader would accept? Look for labels such as “non-compliant”, “refused services”, “difficult” or “known to police”. Ask whether the facts behind each label are recorded, or whether the label stands in for them. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

What is it being used for?

9. Do you know whether this entry was used in a decision about you? A refusal letter, a closure notice or an assessment score may rest on it. If you cannot tell, that is a question to ask. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

10. Would a stranger reading only this record get a fair picture of you? Picture the next caseworker, school or agency to read it without having met you. Would they understand what happened, or would they draw a conclusion you would have to undo? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure. Notes:

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03 Reading your answers

Do not add up your answers. One serious "No" can matter more than nine "Yes" answers, and a page of "Not sure" answers can be the most useful result of all. Look at which group each "No" or "Not sure" falls in.

If your "No" or "Not sure" answers are mainly in	The problem is usually	The next step that fits
Questions 1–3 (is it right?)	An error of fact, someone else's information, or out-of-date information	Ask for a **correction**, with evidence if you have it
Questions 4–5 (is it whole?)	Something important is missing	Ask for an **addition**: your explanation or document placed with the entry
Questions 6–8 (how it is written)	An opinion or a label presented as fact, or an unclear source	Ask for the entry to show **whose view it is and what it rests on**. If the holder will not change it, add a **statement of disagreement**
Question 9 (is it being used?)	You do not know what the entry affected	Ask the holder **which decisions relied on it**. The question cards *Who Checked My Case?* help here
Question 10 only	The entry may be accurate but gives a lopsided picture	Consider a short **statement** giving the context, rather than a correction

Some entries are accurate and still painful to read. A fair record is not the same as a flattering one, and an accurate entry is unlikely to be removed because it hurts. You can still add context, and you can still ask who sees it. The question cards *Who Can See and Share My Records?* cover who sees it.

Not every problem is worth a dispute. It is reasonable to leave an entry alone if it affects nothing, or if challenging it would cost you more than it is worth. Write down that you looked at it and decided to leave it, in case it matters later.

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04 Your summary

Entry (date, page or section)	Questions answered “No” or “Not sure”	Kind of problem	What I will ask for, or “leave it”	Evidence I have or need

Carry each row you decide to act on into Part C of *Records Request, Correction Request and Reply Log*.

RELATED: *Seeing, Questioning and Correcting the Records Held About You*, for reading and correcting your records; *Records Request, Correction Request and Reply Log*, for requesting records and logging replies.

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05 Further reading

1 **US Department of Education, Student Privacy Policy Office, FERPA**. An example of a law that lets a person challenge a record as "inaccurate, misleading, or in violation of" privacy rights. Its three grounds are broader than plain factual error.

2 **Information Commissioner's Office, Your right to get your data corrected**. How UK data protection law treats inaccurate and incomplete records, including opinions.

3 **US Government Accountability Office, Assessing Data Reliability (GAO-20-283G, 2019)**. Its tests of accuracy, completeness and fitness for the intended use underlie several of the questions here.

QUESTION IT

Found an error, or want to question this document? Contact Prova at hello@byprova.com.

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