

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department  
Advanced Officer Training Division

Report Writing- Update  
Expanded Course Outline

**I. Registration/Introduction**

- A. Introduction
  - 1. The instructor will introduce him/her self to the class and cover an over view of the topics and goals
  - 2. The students will introduce themselves the each other in pairs, then one student will present the information delivered by the partner in front of the class
- B. Group assignments
  - 1. Students will be divided into teams for duration of course. An attempt will be made to have each team consist of officers from the same agency
  - 2. The students will work in groups to practice critically thinking through issues with organizing and interpreting the information provided that is intended on becoming a part of the report

**II. Initiating an investigation**

- A. Arrival
  - 1. Arrive safely
  - 2. Avoid driving to front of location
  - 3. Consider approaching on foot
    - i. Officer Safety
    - ii. Protection of evidence (casings, blood, etc)
- B. Protection of life
  - 1. Primary consideration
  - 2. Allow fire/medics to do their job
- C. Control subjects
  - 1. Immediately identify possible suspects/witnesses
  - 2. Separate subjects so statements are not affected by others perceptions
  - 3. Try to avoid making any immediate arrests if possible
- D. Obtaining information
  - 1. After determining those involved, obtain identifying information
    - i. Collect CDL's/ID Cards to avoid people leaving the scene
    - ii. Confirm name through dispatch to get a positive ID on subjects
  - 2. If it is a large crime scene with multiple witnesses, delegate responsibilities to multiple officers to make the scene manageable
- E. Protection of evidence
  - 1. Establish a crime scene perimeter if necessary
  - 2. Attempt to protect evidence without moving it from its original location
    - i. Consider safety issues with firearms or other weapons, it may be necessary to immediately secure all weapons involved
    - ii. Photograph evidence as soon as possible

**III. Investigative questions**

- A. Who
  - 1. Who is the reporting party?
  - 2. Who is involved as the victim?
  - 3. Who is the suspect?
  - 4. Who are the suspect's friends and associates?
  - 5. Who knows what happened?
  - 6. Who do I need to talk to?

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department  
Advanced Officer Training Division

7. Who is a witness?
8. Who was with the victim?
- B. What
  1. What happened (Crime?)
  2. What was the victim doing?
  3. What was used to commit the crime?
  4. What has happened since I was called?
  5. What do we know so far?
  6. What are the next things that need to be done?
  7. What time did it occur?
  8. What time was it discovered?
  9. What time were the police notified?
  10. What was the relationship between the suspect and victim?
- C. Where
  1. Where did it happen (Jurisdiction)?
  2. Where is the victim?
  3. Where is the informant?
  4. Where is the evidence?
  5. Where were the witnesses?
- D. When
  1. When did it happen?
  2. When was it reported?
  3. When was the victim last seen?
  4. When was the suspect last seen?
- E. Why
  1. Why did it happen?
  2. Why was it reported?
  3. Why did witnesses not tell you something?
  4. Why did witnesses tell you certain things?
  5. Why did the crime happen the way it did?
- F. How
  1. How did the event happen?
  2. How did the suspect get there?
  3. How did the victim get there?
  4. How did the suspect get away?
  5. How did the suspect know the victim?
  6. How was the event reported?
  7. How old is the crime?
  8. How much more needs to be done?

**IV. Note taking**

- A. Ensure legibility
  1. Use words or shorthand you understand
  2. Write clearly so you can read the notes later
- B. Items to include
  1. Measurements
  2. Sketches
  3. Suspect/Victim/Witness statements and quotes
  4. May be subject to subpoena
  5. Avoid personal information

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department  
Advanced Officer Training Division

**LEARNING ACTIVITY #1-** Students will watch a training video of an officer investigating a crime. The students will work together in a group and answer the questions of who, what, where, when, how and why in response to the information provided on the video. The activity will provide the student with additional skills in observation and note taking. This activity will tie in to teach the student how to properly write a criminal report. At the end of this exercise, the students will choose a spokesperson and discuss an overview of what they observed.

**V. Rules of narrative writing**

- A. First person
  - 1. Refer to yourself in the report as "I"
  - 2. Refer to others by their last name
- B. Past tense
  - 1. The actions you are investigating have already occurred, use proper tense
  - 2. Do not change between past and present tense in the report
- C. Active voice
  - 1. Be specific as to what was done and by who
  - 2. Do not be vague when describing an action that occurred
  - 3. Use short, clear, concise, and concrete words
- D. Chronological order
  - 1. Tell the story as it happened
  - 2. This will illustrate the cause and effect of the incident

**VI. Describing Persons and Property**

- A. Categorizing
  - 1. Victims
  - 2. Reporting parties
  - 3. Suspects
  - 4. Witnesses
  - 5. Others
  - 6. Involved parties
- B. Describing property
  - 1. Photos & sketches
  - 2. Determining value
- C. Evidence
  - 1. Chain of custody
  - 2. Process of scene

**VII. Crime Reports**

- A. Forms
  - 1. Face sheet
  - 2. Narrative
    - i. Organization
    - ii. Headings
  - 3. Property sheet
    - i. Evidence
    - ii. Stolen property
    - iii. Recovered property
    - iv. Safekeeping
  - 4. Supplemental reports
- B. Purpose
  - 1. Documentation of events

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department  
Advanced Officer Training Division

2. Documentation of property that was stolen
3. Documentation of injuries
4. Documentation of statements

**VIII. Arrest Reports**

- A. Documentation
  1. Misdemeanor or felony
    - i. Select proper code
    - ii. Cover the elements of the crime
  2. Private Person/Citizen arrest form
  3. Probable Cause
    - i. Cover the reason for the contact
    - ii. Cover the reason for the arrest
- B. Suspect identification
  1. 6 pack line up
    - i. What is a 6-pack line up
    - ii. How to document it in the report
    - iii. Purpose of a 6-pack line up
  2. Infield line up
    - i. When to use one
    - ii. How to conduct an infield line up
    - iii. How to document it in the report
  3. Name provided by a victim/witness
    - i. Use it as an investigative lead
    - ii. Find methods to create a confirmed identity from only a name

**ACTIVITY #2-** While working in a group, students will be given a report. The report will be cut into sections so each section of paper contains one heading and the narrative content for that heading. The students will use the knowledge gained in chronology and organization to place the headings in the most logical order to recreate the original report. This activity is similar to a puzzle, but instead of matching shapes for a perfect fit, the student will match the content of the report to create the proper order. Students will learn to recognize the importance of proper organization and cohesion when writing a report. The students will compare their results with the original report to check for accuracy.

**IX. Automated Report Writing**

- A. Computer
  1. Advantages v. Disadvantages
    - i. Sometimes the system goes down
    - ii. Everyone can access the report when it is done
  2. Electronic filing to the DA
- B. Dictation
  1. Keep the pace slow
  2. Speak clearly so the information is copied correctly
  3. Review the report after it is typed for accuracy

**X. Issues in Writing**

- A. Fact or Opinion
  1. Fact can be proven
  2. Opinion is a personal belief or judgment that cannot be proven.
- B. Documenting Admonitions

San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department  
Advanced Officer Training Division

1. Miranda
2. Field Show-ups
- C. Commonly misspelled words
  1. Identify which are most commonly misspelled
  2. Identify where to get the correct spelling
  3. Identify who a misspelled word can change the meaning of the sentence
- D. Common grammar errors
  1. Avoid run on and choppy sentences
  2. Improper punctuation can change the meaning of the sentence

**ACTIVITY #3-** The students will be given a summary of an officer describing an investigation in a conversational tone. The students will work independently to write a criminal report of the incident. Using the observation and note taking skills learned in the first activity the student will create a criminal report using the proper forms and format. The student will exchange reports with a different student and critique each other's reports for errors in content and organization. The instructors will monitor the activity and ensure the reports are complete. The instructor will review each report at the end of the exercise to ensure all reports are complete, and critiques are constructive.

## **XI. Course Review and Evaluation**

- A. Demonstration
  1. Learning Activity Result
    - a. Student incorporated techniques for report writing to complete more thorough reports and investigations
    - b. Demonstrated knowledge through problem solving activities which resulted in a completed report
  2. Student Ability
    - a. Student wrote a complete, concise report
    - b. Student showed an improved report writing skill
- B. Evaluation
  1. Students will complete an evaluation on the class and instructor
  2. Students will be provided with feed-back reference the sample reports that were completed in class