

Private Protective Services

Title:	Field Note Taking and Report Writing
Lesson Purpose:	To present to the student the purpose, value and components of report writing.
Training Objectives:	<p>At the end of this block of instruction, the student will be able to achieve the following objectives in accordance with the information received during the instructional period:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. List the purposes of writing and using field notes and how to effectively capture information.2. Determine the four purposes of report writing.3. Identify the seven characteristics of a good report.4. Demonstrate how to effectively write a narrative report using who, what, when, where, how and why as questioning strategies.
Hours:	Three (3)
Instructional Method:	Conference/Discussion Report writing practical exercise
Materials Required:	Lesson Plan Pen/Pencil/Paper
References:	<p>Adams, Thomas F. <u>Police Field Operations</u>. 5th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.</p> <p>Brislin, Ralph; Cirignano, Bonita; and Varner, Carolyn. <u>Effective Report Writing for Security Personnel</u>. Newton, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1994.</p> <p>Fraze, Barbara and Davis, Joseph. <u>Painless Police Report Writing</u>. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall, 1993.</p> <p>Heitert, Robert. <u>Security Officer's Training Manual</u>. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993.</p>

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Meadows, Robert. Fundamentals of Protection and Safety. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995.

Miller, S. Dennis. How to Write a Police Report. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers, Inc., 1993.

Miller, Mark R. Police Patrol Operations. Placerville, CA: Copperhouse Publishing Company, 1995.

Wilson, John B. and Hayes, Sean. A Competence-Based Approach to Police Report Writing. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984.

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Title: Field Note Taking and Report Writing - Practical Exercise Scenario Sheet

DIRECTIONS: Write a complete narrative report concerning your investigation of the following shoplifting incident:

A. People Involved

1. Debra Ramsey - Shoe clerk
2. Claudia Ross - Suspect

B. Place of Crime

Belk's Department store, shoe section

C. Date/Time Crime Occurred

February 28, 2017

D. Facts

You work for a major department store as a security guard and are monitoring the surveillance cameras in your store. You observe a shoplifting incident. You observe the subject exchange the shoes she is wearing with a new pair from a box on the shelf. You notify staff and the subject is apprehended at the main entrance of the store. The subject is led back to the office and the box containing the old shoes was retrieved from the shelf by the clerk in the shoe section.

(Students should fill in the rest of the report based on their company policy, and how they would process this incident.)

Source: S. Dennis Miller. How to Write a Police Report. (Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 132.

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Title: Field Note Taking & Report Writing

I. Introduction

A. Opening Statement

Preparing a written report is one of the most important responsibilities of a security guard. For example, a well-written report presents the facts in order by stating what happened, who was involved and when it happened. Written reports are critical in documenting the “who, what, where, when, how and why” of any circumstance. Good report writing takes practice and patience.

B. Training Objectives

C. Reasons

There are numerous times when security guards are required to write a report concerning their activities. These reports are for employers, clients and the police. Due to the many similarities in documentation procedures involving police and security, it is practical and convenient for the report format taught in this block of instruction to be in the same consistent manner that police departments use. In this way, written communication can flow more easily between private security and local law enforcement, thereby increasing the effectiveness of both.

II. Body

A. Note Taking

Many things influence the process of memory recall. They include ability, training, practice and effort. Even with these qualities sharpened to a maximum degree, no one can remember details forever. “On the spot” note taking helps to prevent this problem. These notes are commonly called “field notes.” If accurate field notes are not taken, an incident will become clouded over time. The danger of this is clear. If you do not make notes of an incident, you may not be able to prove critical elements of it at a later time, possibly in a courtroom situation. Field note-taking and report writing, like patrol, are tied to your professionalism.

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A guard's notes are briefly written facts/statements of specific events and may serve as a basis and an aid for completing your reports and investigations.

1. Notes can be permanent.

Notes provide a greater degree of accuracy than memory. It is recommended that you retain your notes for at least a year or two, unless you have incorporated them fully into a report and they are no longer needed. Check your company's policy in retaining/destroying your notes.¹

2. Notes are an aid in the investigative process.

Failure to take notes during an investigation may result in the inability to recall many of the facts relating to the incident. An experienced and professional security guard should note all the activities, information, evidence or other facts discovered during an investigation. Additionally, your notes can help investigators pinpoint other facts that may prompt them to re-examine the scene further or to question more witnesses. Your concrete notes may even lead them to open new areas to investigate. The security guard's notes should include:

- a. Your arrival and departure time
- b. Victim statements
- c. Witness statements
- d. Evidence found
- e. Suspect information
- f. Details of the crime
- g. Crime scene diagram
- h. Weather conditions
- i. Lighting conditions

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3. Notes can aid you in providing accurate testimony necessary in court.

Your field notes can become a form of evidence. Considerable information is sometimes needed during the course of an investigation. Statements are made, names and addresses are obtained, descriptions are given, and measurements are taken. If these findings are not recorded as they are found, they may never be accurately and completely recalled. If your testimony were based on memory alone, many important details could be forgotten or cause you to provide inaccurate information.

There is usually a considerable time lag between when a crime incident occurs and when it finally goes to trial. Your ability to testify with authority, accuracy and completeness is limited if you rely on memory alone. Take notes during all of your activities and refer to them if you are called upon to testify.

4. Your field notes can be used as a log.

“Another function for your field notebook is to record events and circumstances that happened during your shift. In effect it is a log of the security guard’s activities in chronological order. Not everything a guard does during the shift is later written in a report. In fact most activities during each shift never are the subject of a written report. For this reason, your field notebook becomes the primary source of documentation of your activity and observations while at work.”ⁱⁱⁱ

B. Helpful Hints for Effective Note Takingⁱⁱⁱ

“Every security guard should always carry a pen and small pocket notebook in order to document key facts as they occur. Names, titles, and descriptions can often be noted quickly - even during an emergency. These small ‘tidbits’ of information can prove to be critical months later.

The following are helpful hints to remember when you are reconstructing the incident from your notes in preparation for writing your report:

1. Write what happened in chronological order. What happened first, then what happened next, and next, etc.

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2. Be sure to include all names, positions, titles, and department numbers of all employees.
3. Include names, addresses, telephone numbers, if possible, of all non-employees who either witnessed or were involved in the incident.
4. Explain in plain, simple terms what happened. If you mention a building by its name or number, give its location as well. Remember, many people who read your final report may not be familiar with directions and locations as you are.
5. When you begin to write your report, refer to your notes. Do not include your opinion or comments and do not editorialize. You can give your opinion or comments about the incident in person to your supervisor.
6. Write your report before you leave work. Leaving the job before your report is written gives an unfavorable impression of your security department.”

C. Report Writing Purposes

There are four basic reasons for writing a report:

1. To inform

“Every report you write may be read by many individuals:

 - a. Supervisors and other immediate working staff
 - b. Clients and their staffs
 - c. Law Enforcement Officers - Follow-up investigators and initial reporting patrol officers
 - d. Attorneys - Prosecution, defense, civil, and judges
 - e. Media representatives - Newspapers, radio and television
 - f. Regulatory agencies - Motor vehicle departments, insurance commissioners, OSHA, consumer affairs

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g. Medical professionals - Doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists^{iv}

2. To record

Accurate written communication reduces the chance of misunderstanding an error. Do not use pronouns such as he or she, instead use proper names so there is no mistake who you are describing in your report. Never trust to memory that which can be recorded on paper. Unless properly recorded, events, dates, times, etc., can easily be forgotten.

3. To demonstrate alertness

As you record and accurately report incidents, you inform your supervisor and client of the job you are doing. Many people wrongly think that security guards do little but stand around. One way to avoid this negative image is to document all important or irregular incidents occurring on your post.

4. To protect yourself

There may be a time when it becomes necessary for you to prove you were aware of a certain event or condition. Documentation is one of the best ways to ensure you remember the facts.^v

D. Characteristics of a Good Report^{vi}

1. Clear

The language and structure must be simple and to the point. Facts presented must follow a logical order. Use simple words to clarify. Avoid using words that can have double meanings, slang, jargon, and unnecessary abbreviations. "Clear writing is exemplified by writing in the first person, using "I" instead of 'this writer' or 'this guard observed . . .'"^{vii}

2. Legible

When handwritten, notes must be easy to read. Print if necessary. Make your letters clear and distinct. A personal form of shorthand, which is foreign to others, should not be used. Others must be able to read your reports.

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3. Complete

All related facts should be included in the report. Omitting facts because they may not necessarily support your theories is improper and should be avoided. The following questions should be answered:

- a. Who
- b. What
- c. When
- d. Where
- e. How
- f. Why

4. Accurate

Reports must be based on facts. Opinions and theories are proper only when requested and clearly labeled as such. Names, phone numbers, etc., should be double-checked for correctness.

5. Objective

Remember there are always two sides to every story, and both sides have a right to be told. You must not be influenced by emotion, personal prejudice, or opinion. Information should be based on facts and principles.

6. Prompt

Reports should be completed as soon as possible and always before ending your shift.

E. Six Elements of a Report^{viiiix}

There are six elements in a report: who, what, when, where, how, and why.

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A report must be self-explanatory. It is often directed to a person removed from the scene of the incident. For a report to be self-explanatory, it must answer the following questions:

1. **WHO:** There are many who's in a report. When writing a report, try to answer as many of these questions as possible.

NOTE: Show slide, "WHO?"

- a. WHO did it?
- b. WHO is the victim?
- c. WHO witnessed the incident?
- d. WHO is the owner of the property?
- e. WHO was notified?
- f. WHO made the notification?

2. **WHAT:** "The WHAT question is the heart of the report.

- a. WHAT happened?

Your report must state this as accurately as possible. If you are informed that property is missing, do not simply assume that it was stolen. This can mislead investigators. Rather, record it as "missing property." It may have been borrowed, misplaced or moved. The best advice to follow when writing a report is: **DO NOT ASSUME ANYTHING!**

- b. What evidence is present?
- c. What elements are present proving a crime occurred?
- d. What type(s) of property were missing?
- e. What damages or injuries occurred as a result of this incident?

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3. **WHEN:** Deciding WHEN an incident occurred is very important. The time may be critical to further investigation. Remember to record:

- a. The time
- b. The day of week
- c. The date

If the time or date is unknown, this should be recorded as follows:
“Between (time), (day), (date), and (time), (day), (date) . . .”

4. **WHERE:** The location of an occurrence can have a significant bearing in establishing many points in a further investigation.

- a. WHERE exactly did the incident occur?
- b. WHERE did the incident start and where did it finish?
- c. WHERE are any witnesses or suspects?

5. **HOW:** When the “How” is known, action may be taken to prevent the action from happening again. The following are examples of HOW questions:

- a. HOW was entry gained?
- b. HOW was the person injured?
- c. HOW was the damage done?

6. **WHY:** WHY is perhaps the most difficult ingredient of a report. WHY involves judgment and opinion that must be carefully recorded by the security guard. HOW should not be confused with WHY. WHY involves the motives of those involved. WHY does have its place in a report but it must be supported with facts wherever possible. Examples of information relating to WHY are:

- a. WHY was the person injured?
- b. WHY did the accident occur?

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- c. WHY was the person in an “unauthorized” area?
- d. WHY was the item taken?

III. Conclusion

A. Summary

During this block of instruction we listed the purposes of writing and using field notes to secure vital information. We learned about the purposes of writing complete reports and identified the distinguishable characteristics of a good report. Finally, you were given an opportunity to practice writing a narrative report to demonstrate what you learned during this block.

B. Questions from Class

C. Closing Statement

Hopefully, you can now see the value in writing clear, effective and grammatically correct reports. These reports reflect your mental aptitude and ability to perform your job. Your supervisor will note your strengths and weaknesses so strive earnestly to improve any deficiencies you may have. Work hard to develop this very important skill. Presenting professionally includes how well you communicate both verbally and in writing.

NOTES

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- i. Thomas F. Adams, Police Field Operations 5th edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), p. 385.
 - ii. S. Dennis Miller, How to Write a Police Report (Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 111.
 - iii. Ralph Brislin, Bonita Cirignano, and Carolyn Varner, Effective Report Writing for Security Personnel (Newton, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1994), p. 87.
 - iv. Barbara Frazee and Joseph Davis, Painless Police Report Writing (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall, 1993). p.76.
 - v. Dennis Miller, How to Write a Police Report, p. 109.
 - vi. Frazee and Davis, Painless Police Report Writing, pp. 76-78.
 - vii. Dennis Miller, How to Write a Police Report, pp. 58-59.
 - viii. Mark Miller, Police Patrol Operations (Placerville, CA: Copperhouse Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 345-348.
 - ix. John B. Wilson and Sean Hayes, A Competence-Based Approach to Police Report Writing (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984), pp. 69-79.