



WRITTEN REPORTS: CONTENT & STYLE

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Contents:

- I. Report Writing Requirements
- II. Content
- III. Style of Report Writing
- IV. Proponent Unit
- V. Cancellation

I. REPORT WRITING REQUIREMENTS

A. Written reports *not produced in the records management system or other reporting/document producing applications* will be prepared using a medium tip, black, ballpoint pen, or by using a department approved *electronic version of the report/document*.

B. The reporting officer is responsible for the *grammar and* completeness of his/her reports. *Although some data is "required" for National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) reporting, officers are expected to collect and enter as much data and information as possible when writing reports in the records management system.*

C. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring *accurate and complete* reports are submitted *by personnel under their supervision in a timely manner. Supervisors will ensure all data elements required for NIBRS reporting and required by department policy have been entered by author of the report.*

D. The preparation of a written report is part of the process of investigating *reported offenses and certain non-criminal incidents*. Unless specifically directed otherwise by a supervisor, the officer in charge of an investigation will prepare and submit the report of the preliminary investigation before the end of his or her tour of duty, and when time permits, before clearing the call.

E. *Reports are tracked and identified by report numbers. Sequential report numbers are issued by the Communication Section upon request from the report author. A unique report number is used for all offenses/incidents that occur during the same event (same time and place, and in the case of criminal offenses, by the same offender or offenders). All other reports (Supplement Reports, Field Interview Reports, etc.) related to the same event will also use the same report number.*

II. CONTENT

Every police report must address three concerns: the investigation, the action taken as a result, and the case status.

A. Investigation

The purpose of an investigation is to determine the facts of an event of interest to law enforcement - in other words, what happened? The report must answer the following questions to the greatest extent possible:

- 1. WHO - who did what to whom; who is involved in this case? Name the victims, suspects, witnesses.
- 2. WHAT - what happened; what crime was committed; what was taken; what was used to commit the crime?
- 3. WHEN - time of day, day of week, month, and year.
- 4. WHERE - where was the crime committed; where was the weapon found; where was the victim taken?
- 5. HOW - how was the crime committed?

6. WHY - what is the motive of the crime?

The investigator must collect, verify and report as much relevant information as possible. Part of the investigator's job is to verify the accuracy of information reported to him or her as fact.

Always identify the principals of an investigation by full name, address, date of birth, and telephone number.

Verbatim statements should be reported in quotation marks and attributed to the source. Lengthy statements from the victim, suspects, and key witnesses should be ***documented by audio or audio/video recording; or by a written statement that is signed by the person taking the statement and signed by the person giving the statement.***

Opinions should be clearly distinguished from facts. Conclusions of the investigator must be based on reported facts, and clearly labeled.

B. Action Taken

The remainder of the police report should describe the efforts of the investigator to solve the case or take appropriate law enforcement action. It is essential for future reference that the record reflect what actions were taken, who was interviewed, what was learned, what evidence was collected and by whom, where it was stored, and what if any conclusions were drawn.

If anyone was arrested or charged, the report must indicate their identity, the nature of the charges, the arresting/charging officer, and the custody status of the suspect(s).

C. Case Status

The status of a case is determined by the investigator and approved by the supervisor according to criteria stated in Index Code 2203. Any changes in case status will be reported in a supplement report ***and if the case was assigned for investigation, the Investigative Case Status will be updated in the case management application in records management system.***

III. STYLE OF REPORT WRITING

The following guidelines are intended to assist police officers in preparing acceptable police reports.

A. Police reports are similar in writing style to newspaper stories. Emphasis is placed on a concise and succinct reporting of the important facts of the investigation, beginning with the elements of the crime.

B. Use short sentences and paragraphs, and write in the active tense; eliminate unnecessary words.

C. Write in normal English - do not use "legalese" or jargon. Write the narrative as if you were describing it to a friend or co-worker. Avoid using words or phrases that you are not accustomed to using in daily speech and written communication.

D. Organize the report in a logical sequence. Usually, the sequence of events as reported to you is the most understandable or desirable style. Sometimes, once a pattern is established in an investigation, it is helpful to write the narrative in the chronological order of events as they happened.

E. Write in the first person singular when reporting what you did, whom you interviewed, or what you observed. When describing your own role in the case, write "I", rather than "Officer Jones" or "the undersigned", did this or that.

F. Describe the role of each person named in the report. The first time a name appears it should be completely identified by full name ***in the narrative portion of the report. Complete person information, such as*** address, date of birth, telephone numbers, ***email addresses, work/school locations*** and any other identification available ***will be documented in the records management system.***

G. During subsequent references to a person already named, refer to him or her by last name, not by labels such as "witness #1", "block number 13", or "the victim". If there are two or more persons of the same last name, add the first name, or a title such as Mr. or Mrs. that will specifically identify the person.

- H. Use standard or commonly accepted abbreviations only. When in doubt, do not abbreviate.
- I. Avoid ambiguity; use specific and precise descriptive words.
- J. Do not use slang or colloquialism unless it is a direct quote, indicated by quotation marks.
- K. Proofread the report. Make certain it is written with correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Use a dictionary and a thesaurus to check your work.

L. The narrative portion of the report should consist of an introduction, the body, and a conclusion.

M. The introduction should provide initial information that will then lead into the body of the report. The introduction should include the date and time of the officer's response and the location of that response. For example:

"On November 15, 2005 at approximately 1500 hours, I responded to 123 Sycamore Lane in reference to a burglary complaint. Upon arrival, I spoke with Mr. Johnson who resides at that address."

Using this format provides the narrative portion of the report with a clear explanation of the officer's initial response and actions.

Officers who may be tasked with reading from a report in court will find this format easier to read and detectives reading submitted reports will have a clear statement of the actions taken by the reporting officers.

Leaving out these initial narrative facts could lead to confusion when the reader has to look for the information located in other "blocks" on the Incident Report.

N. The introduction, or synopsis, should state the nature of the crime or incident under investigation and identify the victim and, if known, the perpetrator. For example:

1. "Investigation revealed that Jane Doe shot to death John Doe, her estranged husband, on May 14, 2005."
2. "Investigation revealed that the home of James Johnson, 123 Sycamore Lane, Pasadena, MD was burglarized between 0800 and 1600 hours on Tuesday, November 15, 2005."

O. The body of the report addresses the important questions of all police reports - who, what, when, where, how, why, and action taken. It is written in narrative essay form.

P. When writing reports in the reports management system, in addition to writing a good narrative, it is equally important to accurately and fully enter all data elements as part of the report writing workflow (choosing relevant items from drop down lists, selecting relevant check boxes, and entering all other available information. The records management system has robust searching and analytics capabilities, but these capabilities are only effective when good, accurate and complete data is entered into the system.

Q. The conclusion of the report should indicate the status of the case and the need, if any, for further investigation. The conclusion of the report will include details supporting and explaining the case status designation (Open/***Active***, ***Inactive***-Suspended, Closed by Arrest, ***Exceptionally Closed***, Unfounded, ***etc.***) as defined in Index Code 2203.

IV. PROPONENT UNIT: Training ***Division***.

V. CANCELLATION: This directive cancels Index Code 2205, dated ***05-09-17***.