

Report Writing

Why is it Important for Police Officers to write good reports?

It is the building block that the entire criminal justice system uses to build a case.

People are convicted based on good report writing.

People are not charged or cases are lost due to poor report writing.

Who uses police reports and for what purpose?

- Police
 - Keep Statistics
 - Make a record of an incident
 - Release Information to the media
 - Aid Detectives in their investigation
 - Administration

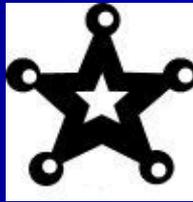
Who uses police reports and for what purpose?

- Prosecutor
 - Decide who to charge
 - Decide who not to charge
 - Decide what to charge
- Defense Attorney's
- Judges
- Insurance Companies
- Probation Officers
 - Used in Sentencing Recommendation
- Department of Corrections
 - Classification of a prisoner

How does Police Report Writing Vary from other types of writing?

- **General writing**
 - **Use of imagery**
 - **Entertainment**
 - **Fiction**
 - **Persuasive**
 - **Satirical**
- **Police Reports**
 - **Factual**
 - **Accurate**
 - **Concise**
 - **Always in Officer Perspective**
 - **Objective**
 - **Can prove Innocents as well as Guilt**

Example of bad report in court



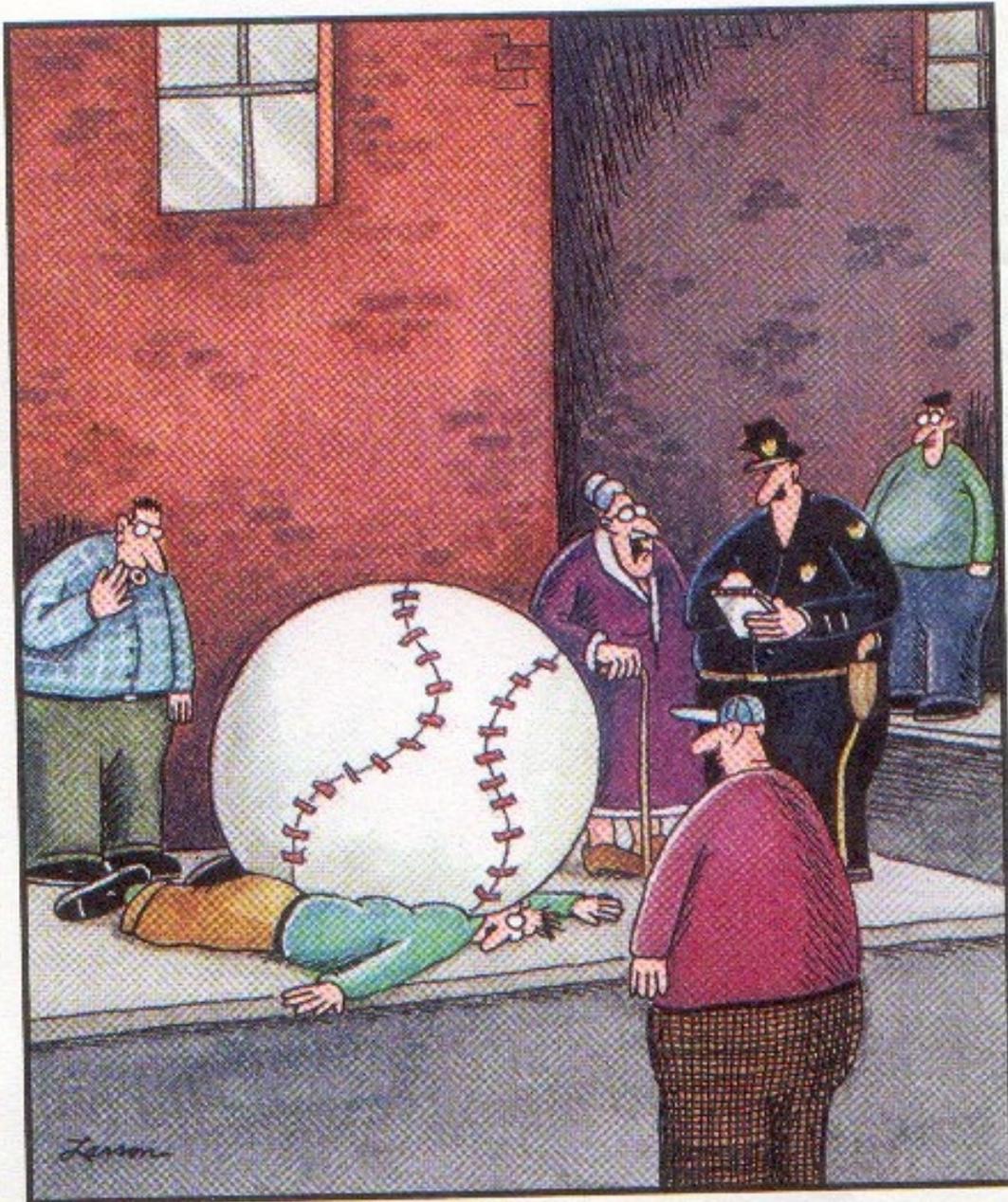
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**ONCE IN COURT ALWAYS
REMEMBER**

**IF IT'S NOT IN THE REPORT
IT DID NOT HAPPEN !**

Elements of Information Gathering

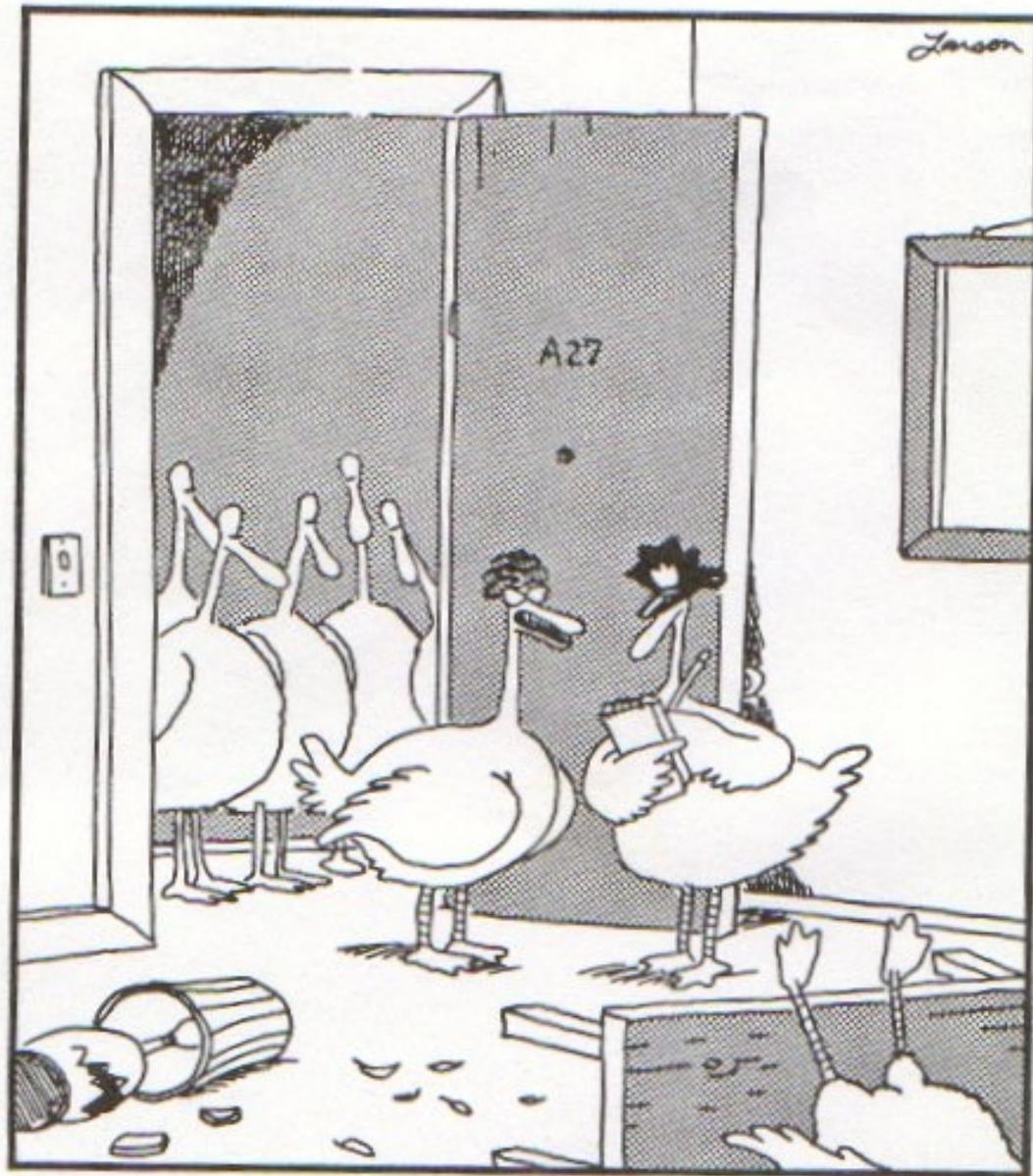
- Observe
- Listen
- Record
- Question
 - Open ended
 - Don't assume (Ask)



"And then wham! This thing just came right out of left field."

Field Notes Should (The basis of a good Report)

- Contain information obtained through inquiry and investigation
- Help recall for report writing
- Help to organize investigation



"Well, from across the hall I could hear this heated argument, followed by sounds of a scuffle. Suddenly, there was this tremendous, blood-curdling 'quaaaaacck!' That's when I called."

Characteristics of Good Field Notes

- Clear
- Complete
- Concise
- Accurate
- Objective

Police Report Need to be:

SPECIFIC

- **Include the exact time of all important events**
- **Make sure each fact connects to your senses (smell, see, touch, hear, taste)**
- **Quote to make the scene come to life**

COMPLETE

- **Include all facts from field notes and sketches**
- **Include the source of each fact**

Police Report Need to be: (2)

ACCURATE

- State exactly how many, how much
- State facts only – not impressions, conclusions, or opinions
- Label every opinion you feel you must report

RELEVANT

- Anticipate use by other law enforcement officers
- Anticipate use by prosecutors or adjusters
- Anticipate the need to defend police conduct

Police Report Need to be: (3)

READABLE:

- **Plain English**
- **Logically Organized**
- **Accessible in design**
- **No distracting errors**

Basic Report Structure

- Block Information
- Narrative
- Conclusion
- Attachments

Basic Report Structure

- **Block Information**

Date and Times of Call and Crime

UCR Information

Complainant / Reporting Person

Person's Biographical info

Vehicle information

Property information

Charging Information

Basic Report Structure

● Narrative

Is the comprehensive story of what the officer saw, heard and did.

– Quote people when appropriate

Answers the questions who, what, where, when, how and why

How and why can be used assume motive and mental state

Basic Report Structure

- Narrative

Establish probable cause

Establish elements of the crime

Explains why you did what you did

DON'T JUSTIFY YOUR ACTIONS. A GOOD DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION AND BEHAVIORS WILL CLARIFY THE NECESSITY OF YOUR ACTIONS.

Basic Report Structure

- **CONCLUSION:**

- Disposition of case (What did you do to finish the case)**

- Follow up needed**

- **ATTACHMENTS:**

- Probable Cause Affidavit**

- Use of Force Form**

- Evidence Collection Information**

- Juvenile Referral Form**

Narrative Rules

- **Write the report in chronological order**
- **Do not use slang or police jargon**
- **Avoid direct quotes except to emphasize point**
- **Do not use profanity unless it is a direct quote**
 - **Always use quotation marks of suspects, victims or witnesses use of profanity in their statements.**
- **Write the report in the first person active voice in the past tense**
 - **I went to the suspect's home.**

Narrative Rules

Brief

Say what needs to be said

Anticipate readers needs

Understandable

Write in the First person. (From your perspective.)

I saw...

Write in past tense.

Do not use codes or acronyms

Double space between paragraphs.

Summarize the following information in report Form

Date of Occurrence: Today

Place of Occurrence: 4949 Cherry Hill Lane 8:15 am

Method of notification: Victim contacted station @ 8:25 am

Arrived at scene @ 8:45 am Victim: Mrs. Alice Berry

Crime: robbery

Suspect: white male, approx. 6' wearing a black t-shirt and black pants and a black ski mask.

Possessed and threatened with a switchblade. Fled on foot.

Stolen: a 14 karat gold necklace, gold ring with a small ruby, watch and wallet containing \$50.

Area patrolled without any sighting of suspect

On (DATE) at approximately 8:25 am I was dispatched to 4949 Cherry Hill Lane to meet Mrs. Alice Berry who reported a Robbery. I arrived at the scene at 8:45 am. Upon arrival I spoke to Mrs. Berry. She stated that at approximately 8:15 am she was robbed. She stated that a white male approximately 6 foot tall wearing a black t shirt, black pants and a black ski mask threatened her with a switchblade. He took a 14 karat gold necklace, gold ring with a small ruby, a watch and a wallet containing \$50. He then fled on foot.

I checked the area and did not observe any individuals fitting the description.

Common Mistakes

Spelling

Verbs in past tense.

CORRECTED

He starts the car. He started the car.

They run away. They ran away.

They continued running away
after being told to stop.

Common Mistakes

2

Apostrophes:

To show possession
leg was broken.

Johnson's

To show a contraction (try to avoid)

It's = It is Don't = Do not

Quotation Marks

For exact quotes: Johnson stated, "If you come any closer I will kill the kids."

When reporting slang or vulgarity it is a quote:

Johnson stated he was "shanked".

Common Mistakes

3

Commas: Used after descriptive clause

At approximately 11:40 pm, I was dispatched to 702 Juniper Rd. Upon my arrival, I saw the suspect run east on Midway Dr.

Be careful:

The suspect's car was blue-green and white.

(Two color car)

The suspect's car was blue/green and white.

(Unclear, Two color or three color or blue over green)

The suspect's car was blue, green and white.

(Three color car)

Common Mistakes

4

Avoid Jargon or Uncommon acronyms.

FBI is clear

PI is not

- Public Intoxication

- Personal Injury

- Preliminary Investigation

- Private Investigator

10-50 is not

Unclear statement

Complainant states that subjects began the assault at about 0300 on Vine Road, where one of the suspects owns a residence.

Who are these people?

Who was assaulted?

Where did it happen?

Use of Names makes the information Clear

Re Write

Mary Veith said that Seigle and Dunne began to punch her husband, John, and her at 3 am at Dunne's house on Vine Road.

Unclear Statement

Because of the weapon, I made personal contact with the older subject and restrained him at the vehicle while Officer Gale directed the younger man to the ground.

What kind of personal contact?

Who had the Weapon?

How was the younger man “directed”?

Re Write

Seeing the gun in Beals hand, I held Sweeney against the car until officer Gale tackled Beals and took away the gun.

FUZZY WORDS Worksheet

Detected

Smelled, Heard, Saw

Exited

Left, got out of

Made an Effort ,
Attempted,
endeavoured

Tried

Police Reports are written in the Past Active Voice

This refers to whether the subject of a sentence acts or receives action.

Active Voice: Kohl resisted the cuffs.

Passive Voice: The cuffs were resisted
by Kohl.

| ACTIVE | PASSIVE |
|--|---|
| Simple Present | |
| The company ships the computers to many foreign countries. | Computers are shipped to many foreign countries |
| Present Progressive | |
| The Chef is preparing the food. | The food is being prepared. |
| Simple Past | |
| The deliveryman delivered the package yesterday. | The package was delivered yesterday |
| Past Progressive | |
| The producer was making an announcement. | An announcement was being made. |

SIMPLE RULE: Keep the Person or object you are talking about at the beginning of the sentence.

Categories

- Assignment
 - Date & Time Dispatched, Self initiated
- Investigation
 - What you saw , heard or did
 - Scene Processing
- Statements
 - List of each person and statements
- Injuries
 - Note type & Location, Treatment
- Additional
- Case Disposition
 - List of Charges Filed, Warrants issued

Specialized Categories OWI

- Assignment
 - Date & Time Dispatched, Self initiated
- Initial Observations
 - Vehicle actions. Alcohol on scene
- Driver Contact
 - Note appearance and actions
- Implied Consent
- Transportation
- Chemical Test
- Case Disposition

General Rules of Order

Dispatched / Self initiated, arrival at scene

What you did, saw and were told

Statements of Victims, Witness & Suspects

Crime Scene Information

Physical Evidence

Disposition of suspects

Attachments