

How to Write a Narrative Investigation Report

A Monograph In
THE POLICE SCIENCE SERIES

Edited by
V. A. LEONARD
Professor Emeritus of Police Administration
Department of Police Science and Administration
Washington State University
Pullman, Washington

How to Write a Narrative Investigation Report

By

WILLIAM DIENSTEIN

*Professor of Social Science and Criminology
Fresno State College
Fresno, California*

Fourth Printing



CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by
CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
BANNERSTONE HOUSE
301-327 East Lawrence Avenue, Springfield, Illinois, U.S.A.

This book is protected by copyright. No
part of it may be reproduced in any manner
without written permission from the publisher.

ISBN 0-398-00454-4 (hard) — ISBN 0-398-07668-5 (paper)

© 1964 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
ISBN 0-398-00454-4 (hard) — ISBN 0-398-07668-5 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 63-18515

First Printing, 1964
Second Printing, 1969
Third Printing, 1972
Fourth Printing, 1975

*With THOMAS BOOKS careful attention is given to all details of
manufacturing and design. It is the Publisher's desire to present
books that are satisfactory as to their physical qualities and artistic
possibilities and appropriate for their particular use. THOMAS
BOOKS will be true to those laws of quality that assure a good name
and good will.*

Printed in the United States of America
N-1

FOREWORD

NARRATIVE REPORT writing is a skill and an art. There are no short-cuts to good report writing. Good report writing requires training and practice. It is hoped that this book will assist those who strive to improve their ability to communicate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE WRITER wishes to express his appreciation for the assistance and cooperation of the following persons in the preparation of this book:

Richard C. Steinmetz, Chief Special Agent, Mutual Investigation Bureau, Chicago, Illinois;

Bradford M. Crittenden, Commissioner, California Highway Patrol, Sacramento, California;

Inspector D. T. Donaldson, Commander, Training Division, California Highway Patrol;

Melvin A. Willmirth, Sheriff, Fresno County, Fresno, California;

Robert L. Saum, Patrol Captain, Fresno County Sheriff's Office, Fresno, California;

Arnold P. Biella, Ph.D., Dean, Department of Humanities, Alameda State College, Hayward, California;

Miss Dorothy E. Smith, Associate Professor of English, Fresno State College, Fresno, California;

Mrs. Wilma F. Wight, Associate Professor of Secretarial Administration, Fresno State College, Fresno, California;

Mrs. Harold Schlitz, Fresno, California.

WILLIAM DIENSTEIN

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	v
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
 <i>Chapter</i>	
1. INTRODUCTION	3
Why Should Reports Be Written?	3
When Should Reports Be Written?	5
2. WHAT INFORMATION IS INCLUDED IN A REPORT	8
Who is Involved?	10
What Happened?	14
When Did It Happen?	16
Where Did It Happen?	18
Place of Occurrence	18
Place of Apprehension	19
Location of Recovered Property	20
Location of Witnesses	20
Location of Victim	20
Diagrams, Sketches, Plans, Photographs	21
How Did It Happen?	22
Offenses Against Persons	23
Offenses Against Property	24
Burglary	24
Theft, Larceny	25
Worthless Checks	25
Embezzlement	27
Arson	27
3. WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD REPORT WRITING?	33
How Can Accuracy Be Achieved?	33
Fact vs. Hearsay	34

	<i>Page</i>
Facts vs. Opinions	36
Fact vs. Conclusion	37
Use of Words	39
How Can Completeness Be Achieved?.....	41
Incomplete Information	42
Undeveloped Leads	42
How Can Brevity Be Achieved?	43
How Can Impartiality Be Achieved?	45
How Can Proper Form Be Achieved?	47
Language Guide	48
Sentence Structure	48
Paragraphs	50
Abbreviations	51
Capitalization	51
Numbers	52
Pronouns	52
Punctuation	53
End Marks	53
Parentheses	53
Apostrophe	54
Colon	54
Comma	55
Dash	56
Italics	57
Omissions	57
Quotation Marks	57
Semicolon	58
Hyphen	59
Errors in Composition	59
Mechanics of Composition	61
Names	61
Addresses	63
Telephone Numbers	63
Dates	64
Time	64
Witnesses	65

Contents

xi

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
Sources of Information	66
4. WHAT ARE THE PARTS OF THE REPORT?.....	67
Title Page	67
File Number	67
Status	68
Date of Report	68
Report Made By	68
Period of Investigation	69
Names	69
Subject	69
Offense	70
Synopsis	70
Details	71
Undeveloped Leads	72
Conclusions	72
List of Witnesses	74
List of Exhibits	75
5. SUMMARY	76
<i>Appendix</i>	79
<i>Reference List</i>	111
<i>Index</i>	113

How to Write a Narrative Investigation Report

INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD REPORTS BE WRITTEN?

THE LAW ENFORCEMENT officer writes an investigation report to record his activities and findings. The report is the written recollection of the officer and provides a permanent official record of his actions, his observations, and his discoveries. The report is the written record of the impressions upon the writer of the circumstances of a situation. The investigation report is the word picture of an investigation, beginning with a complaint, order, offense, or arrest. It is the permanent record of the case, the basic reference to the case, the basis for evaluation of what has been done, the basis for deciding further action, and the basis for prosecution. In fact, the report becomes "the case."

The report is the method by which an officer communicates his findings to those interested in his activities. Although reporting may be done orally to colleagues or immediate superiors, a written report, as stated above, is a permanent reference and record. There can be no doubt as to what the officer reported. The written report enables a fellow officer to know what another officer has done and found. It enables the superior officer to know what his men have done; it enables him to keep track of the various activities and investigations of his men; it enables him to know the types of crimes being committed and the manner in which they are committed; it enables him to see relationships among the findings of his men from which he may be able to determine possible connections among cases. The written report is the basis upon which the superior officer can offer advice and make suggestions for further investigation or subsequent handling of the case. Finally, it is the record upon which the office of the prosecutor bases its action.

Information obtained from the various reports of a police