

**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.

© 1964 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
ISBN 0-398-00454-4
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 Schlintz, 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

department can be tabulated by a central office within the department to give a complete crime picture of a city or of an area within the city. Reports aid in the deployment of men and equipment in keeping with the crime picture at a given time. Men can be concentrated in areas showing a rise in particular types of offenses. Men can be alerted to be on the lookout for signs of the known *modus operandi* of the unidentified perpetrators of a series of offenses.

The records of a police department based upon the reports of its personnel are an aid in the planning of the police budget and the distribution of funds within a department. Long range planning for the department to meet changing crime conditions is based on the information from reports.

Reports can be used to point up the training needs of personnel so that they may be better able to cope with specific crime conditions. The weaknesses and strengths of the department can be ascertained and training programs developed to eliminate the weaknesses.

The report serves as a record for later reference. A single report may be only one part of a more complex case on which other officers within the department as well as officers of other agencies within the state or in other states may be working. The activities and findings of any one officer in such a case may have unforeseen implications and ramifications, and his reports may be of inestimable value to other officers and agencies. His report may form the basis for plans and actions by personnel and agencies of whom he may be unaware.

The report represents a convenient method for keeping other interested local public agencies such as the fire, health, welfare, probation, and parole departments informed of conditions with which they are concerned. Since the welfare of the community is the concern of all, especially of public agencies, and crime is an offense against the community, the work of the police agency in combatting offenses against the community should be available to assist other public agencies when appropriate.

In addition to aiding the work of other public departments and thereby developing the cooperation that is so essential to local government, the information derived from reports can be used to

keep the public informed of police problems and accomplishments. Such information becomes the basis for public support of the police agency. Reports then become a foundation for a public relations program acquainting the community with the activities of its law enforcement agency.

If the investigation report goes to the office of the prosecutor, he will be dependent on the facts set out in the report in determining whether or not he has sufficient evidence for a prosecution. If he decides to prosecute, he must rely on the report to show (1) that an offense was committed; (2) who perpetrated the offense; (3) who was the victim; (4) what evidence is available for presentation; (5) what witnesses should be subpoenaed; (6) what the defense might be; and (7) what strategy he should use to counteract it.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the quality of the investigation reports and police records have a direct relationship to the efficiency of a police department and to the administration of justice in a community. It cannot be overemphasized that an investigation, no matter how well done, can be no better than the manner in which the report is written. The investigator must remember that his report tells the reader the manner in which the investigation was conducted, and is the basis for evaluation of the quality of the investigation. A poor report of a good investigation will give the impression of a poor investigation.

WHEN SHOULD REPORTS BE WRITTEN

Reports are sources of information. Reports should be written whenever department policy prescribes that they be written. For example, a department may require that a report be completed at the conclusion of each tour of duty on the condition of the vehicle used. It may require a "contact" report which includes the names, locations, and reasons for stopping and questioning any person. The number of report forms will vary from department to department. Usually, the number of report forms in any police department is related to the kinds of records the department maintains.

Many police officers "fight" reports. The result is that they make their job more difficult and less pleasant. If the officer will

take the time to discover the "why" of the report, he may find his task easier. For example, the vehicle report mentioned above is important to the maintenance division of any department. A poorly operating vehicle is no asset to a police officer.

In general, reports may be classified into four large categories: complaint, offense, arrest, and investigation. A complaint report is completed for every communication to the police department requesting police action. An offense report is completed for every incident or occurrence requiring official police action. An arrest report is completed for every person taken into custody. An investigation report is written by every officer assigned to a case and by each officer who has information about a case even though he may not be assigned to the case.

From another viewpoint, it may be said that reports should be written whenever the action taken and the findings made could be used in the future. This may seem to be a large order. Certainly, not all actions, contacts, observations, and the like will require official department reports. But the officer may want to have written notation of many of his actions, contacts, observations, etc. which he suspects may have consequences. He therefore maintains a personal notebook in which he keeps such information as he deems essential to his work. His notebooks should be filed by dates. He may maintain a name file with cross reference to the notebook entry by date. The value of a personal notebook is as great as the ingenuity of the officer.

For example, while on patrol in a sparsely populated suburban area, an officer noticed a car, which did not seem to belong, parked in the driveway of one of the luxurious houses. The car was not in keeping with the economic status of the neighborhood or with the occupants' friends. The officer jotted down a description of the car, license number, make, model, color, etc., in his notebook, noting the time and date. He habitually recorded in this notebook any unusual events, calls answered, and people contacted. A few days later his office received a report of a burglary from the occupants of the house in whose driveway the officer had noted the strange car. They had been away for several days, and on returning to their residence discovered the burglary. Since the burglary occurred in his territory, the officer refreshed his memory with his notebook and reported the information he had