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Police Reports and Their Purpose

chapter outline

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INTRODUCTION

This book is intended to provide basic report writing skills for the inexperienced and experienced police and correctional officer, as well as for students interested in becoming police or correctional officers. The effect from a poorly written report can be as disastrous as arriving too late at the scene of a shooting, only to find wounded or dead victims. In other words, a bad report can injure or kill an investigation as quickly as a bullet can injure or kill a victim. While most of our examples and language are directed to *officers*, students should still think about and use the tips and rules offered to improve their writing while in school as well as once they are on the job. We begin by discussing why effective police and correctional reports are necessary.

THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE POLICE AND CORRECTIONAL REPORTS

One of the most important, yet often ignored aspects of police and correctional work is report writing. Television shows—a major influence on many people's decisions about joining the police or corrections—place little or no emphasis on the kinds of writing or the amount of writing necessary in police and correctional work daily. Nonetheless, a well-written report can assist a prosecutor in obtaining a conviction whereas a poorly written report can be used by the defense to suggest sloppy police work, or confused thinking on the part of an arresting or investigative officer. Such tactics cause juries to start thinking about whether an officer who is careless in his or her writing might also be careless in other aspects of police work. Similarly, liability issues can soar when a correctional officer drafts an unreadable or grammatically flawed report on some fight or other incident occurring in the jail or prison.

Ironically, when you think about the requisite skills needed to be a good police officer or to perform the job well, you seldom think about skills associated with writing. Rather, you most likely think of defensive tactics, upper-body strength, decision-making skills, proficiency with firearms, and perhaps several other specialized tasks. Yet, the ability to prepare high-quality police reports is likely not to even be on the list. When you consider the requisite skills for correctional work, you may be at an even greater disadvantage because little information about exactly what correctional officers do has trickled down to the general public. What is known is more likely directed toward custodial activities such as escorting prisoners from one side of a correctional facility to another, or breaking up fights and riots. To be sure, little information is known by the general public concerning the kinds or amounts of writing that is endemic to correctional officers.

The truth of the matter is that police and correctional work requires a considerable amount of writing—something television programs seldom clearly illustrate during their faced-paced shootouts and police chase scenes, or when depicting prison galleries with tiers of screaming and/or fighting inmates. Once the smoke clears, the screeching tires are silent, and the inmates are settled, officers involved in such activities in the real world will be set with the task of writing up these incidents. Whether in patrol, investigations, or custody, officers write reports every day and

these reports will be used, sometimes for years, during the course of a criminal investigation, prosecution, and incarceration of a suspect and/or felon. These reports will be read by supervisors, police and correctional administrators, prosecutors, defense counsels, judges, jurors, wardens, and more and more frequently the media. Police reports must be written clearly and concisely and contain a description of the necessary elements of the crime to permit a prosecutor to convince a judge or jury that the accused did in fact commit the crime. Correctional reports must similarly offer clear and concise writing to ensure that proper services are obtained, criminal elements are included, and unnecessary liabilities are not incurred.

Unfortunately, a good deal of law enforcement and correctional officer writing is cluttered with unnecessary verbiage, overly formal language, unclear and imprecise reporting that lacks necessary description of the *corpus delicti* (body or elements of the crime) of the incident being reported, mistakes, jargon, and inconsistencies. Part of the problem may be that there is a kind of culture of police and correctional writing that has been longstanding in most police communities and correctional institutions, and which seems to be perpetuated during the field training process (Rutledge, 2000). This custom of writing instructs young, inexperienced officers to use too many words and to write like a bad B-movie script with improper sentence construction and frequently is redundant and drafted in passive voice. The real problem with this old and traditional custom of police and correctional writing style is that it is almost like teaching officers a second language, when they already know English and could be writing using standard conventions of grammar, syntax, active voice construction, and most of all, proper spelling.

To best understand the importance of the written report, consider the importance of writing as a means of communicating and maintaining records. Police and correctional writing is not designed to entertain, or even be terribly creative, but rather to communicate necessary pieces of information that may be important later during a secondary investigation, or if the case goes to court, during prosecution. Wallace and Roberson (2004, p. 3) suggested that *writing* is a method of recording and communicating ideas through a system of visual marks. While this definition may seem simplistic, it is actually quite complex.

Let's consider it. The first part involves the recording of ideas in a systematic manner that is shared by others so that it may be communicated and understood. The notion that it is *recorded* suggests that it is a more lasting or permanent conveyance of ideas than through spoken language; thus, writing permits review, consideration, revision, and even forecasting of ideas to other situations. Finally, the concept of a system of visual marks indicates that there is a specific manner in which these symbols of shared meanings must be ordered if they are to be meaningful to others. In other words, they must be legible and placed in an accurate order, and the correct symbols must be used if they are to provide the intended shared meanings. *Twin talk*, or the secret language between some twins, occurs among about 40 percent of identical twins (Astington & Baird, 2005). Frequently, these twins develop various gestures, nicknames, abbreviations, and terminology that they use only with one another; other people, even other family members, are at a loss about what is being said. Such a communication system is simply unworkable for police and correctional officers. Thus, even when other police or correctional officers may be able to read and understand the reports of colleagues, the prose must be similarly understandable to many other types of people.

Another definition of writing, more specific to police reports, can be found in the work of Frazee and Davis (2004) who wrote, "Traditionally, a report meant a

‘police report’ or narrative you have to write after completing an investigation. But, actually, reports take many different forms. A report is defined as the following: any documentation recorded on a departmental form, or other approved medium (computer disks), and maintained as a permanent record” (p. 86). In short, these documents involve a kind of technical writing, and not a secret communication, or a creative piece of literature.

Police and correctional officers’ reports should be understood as a category of technical writing, and as indicated earlier, the business of technical writing is quite a bit different than usual essay and creative types of writing taught in high schools and colleges. It is not, however, constructed in a foreign language and should be guided by the same structural and grammatical rules as any other standard written English format. Police and correctional reports provide a means for maintaining official records of events and incidents, including those actions that officers may have done or may have been unable to do, or simply failed to do. Police and correctional reports are important documents and must be understood as representing official records or specific agencies.

RECORD-KEEPING SYSTEMS

Record-keeping systems are systems, processes, and technology used to capture and maintain official records in criminal justice agencies. You might reasonably ask why police agencies and correctional institutions need to keep official records. The obvious answers, of course, are that these reports document criminal or, in some cases, rule-violating incidents; or they may be used to maintain a record of investigative tasks as they are accomplished during that segment of the event; or they accurately record what transpired for certain other pertinent players in the game who, while not present, will need to know the facts of the incident (e.g., investigators, administrators, and prosecuting and defense attorneys).

However, there are a number of less obvious reasons to maintain accurate, well-written records. Among these are efforts on the part of agencies to support or defeat allegations of wrongdoing, or to provide necessary evidence of proper policy and procedures having been used to avoid liability lawsuits.

The Value of Reports

Reports provide the data needed to investigate and apprehend criminals and to solve crimes. In correctional settings, reports similarly allow for investigations of incidents and events that occur in the facility. Investigators and patrol officers frequently use reports to refresh their memory before testifying in court. Trials and court hearings may occur months or years after an incident or arrest. A well-written report can make an officer’s testimony much more accurate and valuable. A poorly written or inaccurate report can create doubt in the mind of the jury as to the veracity or competence of the officer. A few minutes taken to write a complete and accurate investigative report can save an officer or investigator considerable embarrassment and ridicule later on the witness stand.

In some agencies, officers type their reports on typewriters or computers, and then file the paper versions. Others use computers to input their reports directly into the agency’s information storage system and database, thereby maintaining an electronic record of the reports. Some police departments have taken to using a

digital dictation system, in which officers use a telephone to reach a special digital computer processor that handles the officer's voice data like data keyed in from a computer (Associated Press, 2004; Manning, 2000). However the data are stored, the reports are a valuable asset to the department by performing the following functions:

- Provide a written record and a readily accessible memory bank of police and correctional facility business and information.
- Refresh an officer's memory regarding further investigation and administration.
- Provide a means of controlling communication throughout the police department or correctional institution and their associated agencies.
- Provide a database of information for solving similar crimes, perhaps committed by the same criminal or inmate.
- Furnish a base of accurate statistical information on which decisions about resource allocation and policy may be based.
- Aid in identifying criminal, problem, or behavioral patterns, which in turn allows the development of intervention plans.
- Aid in assessing the effectiveness of personnel distribution and analyzing overall agency operations.
- Assist in identifying unusual or periodic intra-agency problems.
- Assist in documenting needs for budget requests and justifications.
- Produce statistical information to be contributed to local, state, or FBI crime databases.
- Provide a vital tool for an agency in carrying out its varied objectives.
- Provide a source of accurate, detailed, and succinct information to prosecute a criminal or inmate where a law has been violated.

AN OVERVIEW OF BASIC WRITING ELEMENTS FOR REPORTS

A number of major issues will be discussed in greater detail throughout the chapters of this book. Among these are spelling and jargon use, verb tense, active and passive voice constructions, pronoun agreement, first- versus third-person writing, gender neutrality, excessive verbiage and legalese, and accuracy, conciseness, and clarity. To ensure that you fully appreciate and understand these basic issues, each is explained briefly in the following sections.

Spelling and Jargon Use

Whether you are a good speller or a mediocre one, it is a good idea to have a standard paperbound dictionary handy when writing reports. If you are not sure how something is spelled, it is unwise to guess and hope you have spelled it correctly. Look up the word and be sure it has been spelled correctly. When writing on a computer, most word processing programs will have a *spelling and grammar* check that will automatically underline a misspelled word, usually in red. If the spell check is unable

to offer the correct spelling of your uniquely created spelling arrangement, do not leave it spelled incorrectly. Either look it up in a paperbound dictionary or choose a different word that you can spell correctly. Similarly, avoid using **jargon**; these are specialized terms with specific meanings associated with a particular occupation or profession. Granted, if you are a police officer using various terms associated with *cop speak*, other police officers will likely understand what you have written. However, as stated, many people—including non-police officers—are likely to read these reports and may or may not be able to understand the various elements of jargon. It is important to keep reports clearly written and understandable. The best way to ensure this is to write in active direct sentences omitting as much jargon as possible. For example, do not use penal or correctional codes and sections, unless they are specific to the crime(s) or incident listed in the report; and define what these codes are in that report at least the first time the code is used. When slang or jargon is used, it should be only when the subject of the report has used these terms, and you are quoting directly.

Verb Tense

Before even discussing verb tense, let's define what a verb is. Most grammar books will tell you that a verb is a word that shows some sort of action (*run, jump, hit, kick*, etc.) or suggests a state of being (*is, are, was, were, am*, and so forth) (see, for example, Straus, 2008). In both police and correctional officer report writing, verbs are likely to be used with a good deal of regularity, so let's now consider **verb tense**. Three major tenses tend to be used in police and correctional report writing: present, past, and future. Present tense involves a construction describing a current event or occurrence:

I am notifying my superior about the incident.

Past tense involves a construction describing something that has occurred already:

I notified my superior about the incident.

Future tense involves a construction where something is described as occurring later or at some time in the future:

I will notify my superior later today.

Active and Passive Voice Constructions

Active voice allows the reader to understand who did what to whom. In other words, when the subject of a sentence is in action (acts or performs some activity) the verb is in active voice. When the subject of the sentence is the recipient of some action, the verb is in the **passive voice**.

Officer Billington used his handcuffs to restrain the violent inmate.
[active voice]

Acting violently, the inmate was restrained with handcuffs.
[passive voice]

The first case tells us who did what action to whom, namely, Officer Billington's action of handcuffing the inmate. In the second sentence, however, we know only what happened to the inmate—that he was handcuffed—but not who handcuffed

him. It is best to write reports in active voice because such sentences tend to be clear and concise and provide correct and accurate information.

Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns are words that are used to take the place of, or to refer back to, nouns or some other pronoun. The pronoun used should agree with the noun it is being used to replace, called **pronoun agreement**. Pronouns permit us to speak about people, places, and things without unnecessary repetition.

Officer Johnson arrived at an active crime scene and drew Officer Johnson's gun.

The awkwardness of this sentence should be obvious as you read the sentence; if you recite the sentence aloud, however, it will likely also sound odd or awkward. A more effective version of this sentence would state it as:

Officer Johnson arrived at an active crime scene and drew his gun.

It is also important that the reader be able to discern to whom the pronoun is referring. Frequently, people misuse pronouns (or overuse them) creating awkwardness and confusion in the sentence. For example,

Officer Johnson and the suspect both had weapons drawn; he then fired his weapon.

The obvious confusion here is who shot whom? A more effective version of this sentence would inform the reader exactly who did the shooting:

Officer Johnson and the suspect both had weapons drawn; Johnson then fired his weapon.

The use of pronouns in report writing will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

First- versus Third-Person Writing

Many police departments and correctional agencies have traditionally instructed their new officers to draft reports using **third person** (referring to the point of view of the noun—discussed more fully in Chapter 2). This may have involved expressions such as *this officer*, *the undersigned officer*, *this writer*, or even *the responding officer*. The basic logic underlying these efforts was the belief that such a writing style would offer a greater amount of objectivity to the report, thereby creating a more professional type of technical writing. Unfortunately, objectivity is achieved not through third-person-oriented writing, but through accurate factual report writing, with the omission of personal opinions and inappropriate types of statements or epitaphs. As we will reiterate in Chapter 2, police and correctional officers must take ownership of their statements by using the **first person** in their reports—a style of writing where the writer uses *I* to describe what he or she observed, did, or said, and what was told to him or her by others.

The undersigned officer arrived at the scene in time to see both inmates being pulled apart by other officers. [third person]

I arrived at the scene in time to see both inmates being pulled apart by other officers. [first person]

Gender Neutrality

Gender neutrality refers to language that neither stereotypes either sex nor appears to be referring to only one sex when that is not the writer's intention. Before the major gender-neutral writing waves of the early 1980s, most writers, and certainly most reports written by police and correctional agencies, used *he* and *him* as universal terms that applied both to males and females. It was simply an accepted writing convention of the times. Today, most writers both inside and outside policing and correctional agencies find the use of specifically gendered statements unacceptable. Most of the one-time gender-specific terms have been replaced by gender-neutral ones. For instance, *policeman* is replaced by *police officer*; *mailman*, by *postal carrier* or *postal worker*. Accurate gender neutrality can be accomplished by using the proper pronoun for each specific sex when the gender of the individual is known and relevant in the writing. For instance,

The witness, Janet Margolis, checked her apartment for missing items while Officer Bartlett completed his burglary report in the living room.

If both males and females are involved in the action or activity being described in the sentence, use a plural gender-neutral pronoun to account for both.

Each officer should check his flashlight to be sure it is functioning properly. [gender-specific pronoun]

Officers should check their flashlights to be sure they are functioning properly. [plural gender-neutral pronoun]

It is important to recognize, however, that you cannot use plural pronouns such as *their* in sentences where the subject is singular.

Excessive Verbiage and Legalese

When writing in passive voice, it is easy to use too many words or write in a confused or verbose manner, termed **excessive verbiage**. This tends to create confused writing and indirect statements rather than crisp, direct, active voice sentences. Perhaps the individual acquired the writing style during a creative writing class in high school or college, thinking that adding excessive amounts of superfluous verbiage makes the writing more artistic, dramatic, or lyrical. Police or correctional report writing does not need to be artistic, dramatic, or lyrical. These are official documents of events that should be maintained by the agency and should be written as clearly, objectively, and accurately as possible. These reports should be detailed, but only insofar as this detail is relevant to describing necessary events, people, and elements of a crime or incident.

Another problem related to words used in the report is the use of **legalese** (legal-sounding or associated terms). Many agencies encourage the convention of using legalese in their efforts to sound both objective and professional. Unfortunately, these efforts often result in the writing sounding unnatural, mechanical, and difficult to understand. Here are examples of clear writing and legalese:

The suspect entered the house by breaking the window and unlatching the lock. [clear writing]

The perpetrator used stealth to gain entry to the edifice, deploying an implement to break the glass, thereby permitting the unlatching of the lock. [legalese]

While this last sentence may *sound* more officious and legalistic, it is simply too wordy and indirect a construction.

Accuracy and Factual Statements

Police and correctional reports should include clearly worded, accurate facts about what is going on, who is present, and what was observed. Anything beyond these factual statements, such as inferences, supposition, and personal opinions, should be kept separate or labeled to avoid confusion by a reader. Subjective summaries and conclusions should be avoided. Instead, the report should describe the actual behavior, movement, or action that might allow the reader to conclude it was a furtive gesture.

The suspect made a furtive gesture. [subjective]

The suspect moved his hand to the inside of his jacket, suggesting he might have a weapon concealed there. [factual]

Reports should also always contain statements about where information has been derived, and from whom.

Conciseness and Clarity

Conciseness is related to an economy of words used in the report. As suggested previously, reports should not be verbose in their construction. Be mindful about writing long, unwieldy and run-on sentences that are not only grammatically inaccurate but also very hard to follow. On the other hand, do not write in such an abbreviated or stilted fashion that sentences do not provide sufficient information to accurately convey the facts, or the necessary elements of a crime or incident. The better the writing, the clearer the information will be conveyed. Clarity, then, has to do with clear, concisely created sentences. Many of the issues discussed earlier will reappear in greater detail during discussions on these and related issues in later chapters of this book.

Reading and Writing Go Hand in Hand

Two things go hand in hand when it comes to good writing—reading and practice writing. It is likely somewhere along the line a teacher may have mentioned this to you, but it is just as likely that you dismissed the notion as quickly as you heard it. You should not do so. The more you read, the better your writing becomes. Although not always immediately recognizable, reading does improve a person's writing in several ways. First, the more you read, the more words, terms, and phrases you learn. This expands your vocabulary and ability to choose better and more precise words when writing reports. Second, the more you read, the more you are able to recognize and unconsciously absorb and learn different writing structures. This allows you to quickly recognize when a sentence has been constructed incorrectly, or to create more complex sentences accurately and with proper grammar. Even short bouts of regular reading, say 15 or 20 minutes a day, can have a beneficial effect on your writing over time; and it doesn't matter if the reading is novels or police technical manuals. The important thing is to read!

Similarly, writing is like any other skill: It requires practice. No one wakes up one morning and suddenly discovers he or she is a brilliant writer. Writing takes practice. The more you write, rewrite, and edit your writing, the better a writer you

will become. Do not leave writing assignments for the last minute; this will result in your turning in inadequate first drafts with many flaws. Rather, leave sufficient time to write a draft, edit it, and perhaps rewrite it. Always proofread your reports, and never rely solely on a computer's grammar and spelling check tool. There is no shortcut to a real physical proofreading of your work. As you begin to write and edit your work more regularly, you will see how quickly your writing can improve. When you are a good writer, writing reports stops being a chore and becomes a simple exercise.

TYPES OF REPORTS

Every police agency uses a wide variety of forms and types of reports. Each report type is designed to meet the unique requirements and mission of each agency. Some state highway patrol agencies, which focus primarily on traffic enforcement, may use report forms that are primarily suited for traffic crash and traffic homicide investigations. Other state law enforcement agencies primarily provide advanced investigative and technical support to local police and sheriff's departments. These agencies typically use reports designed to document findings in criminal or administrative investigations. This variety of forms is needed because each agency investigates different types of incidents and conducts a range of specific types of investigations.

Most local police departments, state and county correctional agencies, and sheriff's offices use a variety of reports to document the types of investigations conducted by their officers and investigators. The layout of most criminal justice and correctional report forms follows a standard format. Each agency designs the placement of information on its report forms to meet its unique administrative needs or requirements. Despite the differences in appearance, essentially all report forms are designed for the same basic purpose: to provide a template for officers to record statistical data to document the people, places, and things related to an incident. They also allow the officer to write clear, concise, and accurate accounts of the investigations and actions in an organized and logical way. Within the grouping of types of reports there are several different styles of reports. Each form is used for a specific purpose by officers and investigators. It is important to understand the differences and similarities between each style.

Incident or Complaint Reports

The **incident or complaint report** is the standard report used by most police and correctional agencies in the criminal justice field. An example of an incident or complaint report is shown in Figure 1-1. It is the preliminary report used to document the full range of criminal and administrative incidents that warrant the attention of police and correctional officers. For police officers this includes everything from homicide investigations to misdemeanor thefts. Correctional officers use incident reports to document criminal acts committed within jails and prisons or violations of institutional rules.

Incident or complaint reports usually have a standard front section or cover sheet that captures the basic information about a given incident or investigation (i.e., dates, times, crime type, agency case number, and location of incident). They should also contain essential information on the people involved in the investigation including names, identifiers, addresses, and contact information of victims,

figure 1-1 Incident/Complaint Report

MISDEMEANOR and/or MISCELLANEOUS REPORT										ORIGINAL																	
CRIME OR INCIDENT: <u>647g PC PROWLER</u>					FILE NO.: <u>07-234</u>																						
STATION: <u>Central</u>		DATE RECEIVED: <u>05/22/07</u>		TIME: <u>2105</u>		RECEIVED BY: <u>Sgt. J.R. Brown</u>																					
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> LAST INFORMANT'S NAME: <u>BRONSON, Helen</u> </div> <div> FIRST <u>Marie (Ms.)</u> </div> <div> MIDDLE </div> <div> TELEPHONE: <u>555-4256</u> </div> <div> E-MAIL: <u>Brony@aol.com</u> </div> </div>																											
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> STREET ADDRESS: <u>567 Maple St., Apt. "C"</u> </div> <div> CITY <u>Chico, California</u> </div> <div> ZIP <u>95926</u> </div> </div>																											
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> LAST VICTIM'S NAME: <u>Same as above</u> </div> <div> FIRST </div> <div> MIDDLE </div> <div> TELEPHONE: _____ </div> <div> E-MAIL: _____ </div> </div>																											
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> IF DIFFERENT FROM INFORMANT) ADDRESS: <u>Same as above</u> </div> </div>																											
LOCATION: <u>567 Maple St., Apt. "C"</u>					DATE OCCURRED: <u>05/22/07</u>		TIME: <u>1950</u>																				
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> SUSPECT <u>Unknown Suspect</u> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> <div> ADDRESS <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; font-size: 0.8em;"> <thead> <tr> <th>DESCRIPTION</th> <th>SEX</th> <th>RACE</th> <th>AGE</th> <th>HEIGHT</th> <th>WEIGHT</th> <th>HAIR</th> <th>EYES</th> <th>DIST. MARKS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><u>M</u></td> <td><u>W</u></td> <td><u>17-19</u></td> <td><u>5'10"</u></td> <td><u>150-170</u></td> <td><u>Blond</u></td> <td><u>Unk</u></td> <td colspan="2"><u>High cheek bones, scar over left eye</u></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <div> OTHER DESCRIPTION <u>Long Blond Hair, shoulder length, parted in center; small round silver rimmed glasses; Brown leather jacket; blue jeans; Dk. blue sneakers</u> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> <div>VEHICLE <u>(NONE SEEN)</u></div> <div>LICENSE NO. _____</div> </div> </div>										DESCRIPTION	SEX	RACE	AGE	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	HAIR	EYES	DIST. MARKS	<u>M</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>17-19</u>	<u>5'10"</u>	<u>150-170</u>	<u>Blond</u>	<u>Unk</u>	<u>High cheek bones, scar over left eye</u>	
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reporters, witnesses, suspects, and assisting officers. Internal agency information such as the investigating officer's name, rank, badge or identification numbers, and unit assignment should also be completed in this section. Space should also be provided to route the report to the appropriate areas within the agency for additional investigation, for criminal prosecution, or for final disposition. The format of this first page is typically fill-in-the-blank or open block style.

The cover sheet section of the incident or complaint report provides facts relevant to the investigation (e.g., *who* was involved, *what* is his or her role in the investigation, *where* did the incident take place, and *when* did the incident occur). This page provides an organized listing of essential statistical information about the case to establish a basis for the reader to understand the narrative summary or synopsis to follow. Formatting the report in this way contributes to a better quality investigative report. Not cluttering the narrative portion of the report with the statistical and demographic information produces a much clearer and more understandable narrative.

The next page or section of the complaint or incident report usually provides an open block section for the officer to write a summary or synopsis of the investigation. This portion of the report should provide the *how* and *why* elements of the incident or investigation, if known. It is the most critical section part of the report and should not be rushed or left incomplete. Adequate time taken here will produce a much better work product and a more successful prosecution or resolution to the case later. This portion of the report is where the observations and actions of the investigator take shape and meaning. A well-written narrative provides the reader with the actions of the officer or investigator, a detailed account of the crime scene, the testimony of witnesses, and descriptions of the evidence. The narrative summarizes the officer's actions and observations chronologically and guides the reader through the facts of the investigation to a logical conclusion or finding.

The incident or complaint report is the mainstay of most police agencies. Almost any incident involving a criminal act will be initially documented on this type of report format.

Source: Brand X Pictures



Supplemental Reports

Most criminal investigations or incidents involve multiple officers and investigators who each contribute to the investigation at different times. Investigative reports typically evolve as the case develops, with new facts and details being added over time. Because each patrol officer or investigator has a unique role in the investigation, he or she documents individual observations and actions separately. Ultimately these **supplemental reports** become the official record of the case and are used in future criminal proceedings or follow-up investigations. Figure 1-2 provides an example of a supplemental report. Investigators must update case files with supplemental information at each stage of the investigation. Supplemental reports are designed to allow for additional information to be added to an incident report from each participating officer. They can also be used by the original investigating officer to add additional information or findings developed after the incident report has been submitted.

Each agency has its own distinct design for supplemental reports. However, some common characteristics are found in most report formats. Supplemental reports typically contain areas to provide basic information that links them to the original incident or complaint report. Fill-in-the-blank or open block style areas are usually provided on the top of the form for the date of the original report, agency case number, location of incident, and any additional victim or witness information to be included. The supplemental reporting officer's name, rank, and agency information is then listed in the appropriate location on the form. The remainder of the form is left for a narrative or summary information. Fill-in-the-blank, open block style, or check boxes for routing and disposition information are also included on the form.

Arrest Reports

Arrest reports are another type of report used primarily by law enforcement officers. Figure 1-3 shows an example of an arrest report. These reports share many of the same formatting characteristics as incident or complaint reports but are specifically used to document facts and evidence to support probable cause when a suspect is arrested. Arrest reports provide areas where specific criminal charges can be listed and the associated criminal statute or ordinance numbers documented. This information is used by jail personnel to make bond or release disposition decisions. The importance of accuracy in listing the appropriate charges and statutes cannot be overstated. Placing the incorrect charge or statute number on an arrest report can potentially jeopardize the prosecution of the case. Arresting officers should always verify the accuracy of this information.

Officers frequently condense arrest reports to just the basic information detailing the elements of the crime and to establish probable cause for the arrest. Their feeling is that only the basic facts are needed for initial review by judges and prosecutors. A complete and detailed account of the incident is then documented in the complaint or incident report. This can be problematic if the writer is not careful to select all of the necessary information for review by the judge or prosecutor who will make a probable cause determination. If relevant details are omitted for the sake of brevity or to save time, the arrest could be invalidated and the suspect released. The best course of action is always to write reports as thoroughly and completely as possible. In this way nothing is left to chance and all of the relevant facts and findings are presented.

figure 1-2 Supplemental Report

Robbery				69. CASE NO. 07-313	
Jackson Police Department					
70. CODE SECTION 459 PC		71. CRIME Burglary		72. CLASSIFICATION Commercial Jewelry Store	
73. VICTIM'S LAST NAME, FIRST, MIDDLE (FIRM IF BUS.) Sparkle's Jewelry Store			74. ADDRESS 246 Barnard St		75. PHONE 555-1505
<p><u>FOLLOW-UP REPORT</u></p> <p>On 07/15/07, 1030 hours, WALTER J. SAUGER, Mgr., Fidelity Loan Co., 208 S. Spring Street, contacted the station and advised Officer TUSCILLO that an unknown individual had tried to pawn a lady's W/G diamond ring, set with a 1/2 karat diamond in a basket setting, engraved "J.A.". SAUGER stated that he did not like the looks of the suspect and refused to take the item. The unknown person left the store and walked south on Spring St., according to SAUGER. Suspect is described as M/W/A, 35-38 yrs, 5'7-9", 160-170, wearing dark trousers, a faded blue shirt with white square buttons; dk. brn. hair, neck length; and dk. sunglasses.</p> <p>Since the above jewelry fit the description of some of the property taken in the burglary of the SPARKLE'S JEWELRY STORE on 07/13/07, reporting officer proceeded to S. Spring Street, where an individual similar to the person described by SAUGER was observed walking south on the east side of Spring St. Suspect was placed under arrest by Officer TUSCILLO at 1040 hours. At that time Officer TUSCILLO informed the suspect that he had the right to remain silent and that any statement he might make could be taken down and used against him in a court of law. He was also advised that he had the right to an attorney of his own choice and to have an attorney present during questioning; that if he so desired and could not afford an attorney, one would be appointed for him without charge. At that time suspect stated that he understood his rights, but was willing to make a statement.</p> <p>A search of the suspect discovered several articles of jewelry similar to the items taken in the SPARKLE store burglary as well as an eight-inch screwdriver. The screwdriver tip appeared similar to the tool impression left on the window ledge of the victim jewelry store.</p> <p>Suspect was identified as HARRY AMES, 406 Maple St., San Francisco, California 94118, and claimed he had just been released from Soledad Prison on 07/10/07, where he had served four years for burglary. He was booked at Central Jail on suspicion of Burglary, Booking #6345K.</p> <p>BENJAMIN SCHWARTZ, owner of Sparkle's Jewelry Store, identified the three rings and a lady's Bulova watch recovered during the search of AMES, all part of the stolen jewelry taken in instant case on 07/13/07.</p> <p>(Include in report) <u>SUSPECT:</u> (description) <u>PROPERTY:</u> (list of items, description, value) <u>ARREST REPORT:</u> (attach copy of arrest report)</p>					
REPORTING OFFICERS Tuscillo, Michele #436		RECORDING OFFICER Tuscillo		TYPED BY mmk	DATE AND TIME 07/15/07 1030
FURTHER ACTION <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO COPIES TO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETECTIVE <input type="checkbox"/> C11 <input type="checkbox"/> JUVENILE <input type="checkbox"/> PATROL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DIST. ATTNY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____ <input type="checkbox"/> SQ./P.D. <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____		REVIEWED BY <div style="text-align: center;">George Aplin, Capt.</div>			DATE 07/15/07

figure 1-3 Arrest Report

Arrest Report										DR #	
Irvine Police Department										Arrestee # _____	
CA0303600											
INVOLV. CODES: ARR – ARRESTEE (BOXES 1 & 39) DET – DETAINED MHD – MENTAL HEALTH			DATE		TIME		LOCATION				
1. INV CODE	2. NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE)				3. SEX M <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/>	4. RACE W B H C J F I P O A U	5. DOB		6. AGE		
7. ALIAS, SCARS, MARKS, TATTOOS, NICKNAMES									7A. G.E.T. <input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		
8. HT.	9. WT.	10. HAIR	11. EYES	12. OLN	13. OLS <input type="checkbox"/> CA	14. POB	15. SOCIAL SEC. #		16. CII #		
17. BOOKING #		DATE	TIME	18. ADDRESS		19. CITY		20. STATE	21. ZIP		
22. RESIDENCE PHONE ()		23. OCCUPATION		24. EMPLOYER/ADDRESS (SCHOOL IF JUVENILE)				25. BUSINESS PHONE ()			
26. CODE SECTION / DESCRIPTION											
# OF WARRANTS ATTACHED <input type="checkbox"/>											
27. PARENT/GUARDIAN NOTIFIED (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE) (IF JUVENILE) <input type="checkbox"/>				28. DOB		29. PHONE # ()		30. NOTIFIED BY		31. DATE/TIME	
32. ARRESTEE'S VEHICLE DESCRIPTION			VYR	VMA	VMO	VST	COLOR(S)	33. IDENTIFYING FEATURES OF VEHICLE			
34. DISPOSITION OF VEHICLE <input type="checkbox"/> IMPOUNDED <input type="checkbox"/> LEFT AT SCENE <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER											
35. ARRESTEE STATUS (ADULT) <input type="checkbox"/> OCJ <input type="checkbox"/> BAIL <input type="checkbox"/> 849 <input type="checkbox"/> PROMISE TO APPEAR <input type="checkbox"/> RELEASED TO				36. ARRESTEE'S STATUS (JUVENILE) <input type="checkbox"/> OCJH <input type="checkbox"/> RELEASED TO PARENTS <input type="checkbox"/> RECOMMEND CSP <input type="checkbox"/> REFER TO PROB <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER				37. MIRANDA YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> DATE: BY: TIME:		38. INVOKED? <input type="checkbox"/>	
Arrestee # _____											
39. INV CODE	40. NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE)				41. SEX M <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/>	42. RACE W B H C J F I P O A U	43. DOB		44. AGE		
45. ALIAS, SCARS, MARKS, TATTOOS, NICKNAMES									45A. G.E.T. <input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		
46. HT.	47. WT.	48. HAIR	49. EYES	50. OLN	51. OLS <input type="checkbox"/> CA	52. POB	53. SOCIAL SEC. #		54. CII #		
55. BOOKING #		DATE	TIME	56. ADDRESS		57. CITY		58. STATE	59. ZIP		
60. RESIDENCE PHONE ()		61. OCCUPATION		62. EMPLOYER/ADDRESS (SCHOOL IF JUVENILE)				63. BUSINESS PHONE ()			
64. CODE SECTION / DESCRIPTION											
# OF WARRANTS ATTACHED <input type="checkbox"/>											
65. PARENT/GUARDIAN NOTIFIED (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE) (IF JUVENILE) <input type="checkbox"/>				66. DOB		67. PHONE # ()		68. NOTIFIED BY		69. DATE/TIME	
70. ARRESTEE'S VEHICLE DESCRIPTION			VYR	VMA	VMO	VST	COLOR(S)	71. IDENTIFYING FEATURES OF VEHICLE			
72. DISPOSITION OF VEHICLE <input type="checkbox"/> IMPOUNDED <input type="checkbox"/> LEFT AT SCENE <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER											
73. ARRESTEE STATUS (ADULT) <input type="checkbox"/> OCJ <input type="checkbox"/> BAIL <input type="checkbox"/> 849 <input type="checkbox"/> PROMISE TO APPEAR <input type="checkbox"/> RELEASED TO				74. ARRESTEE'S STATUS (JUVENILE) <input type="checkbox"/> OCJH <input type="checkbox"/> RELEASED TO PARENTS <input type="checkbox"/> RECOMMEND CSP <input type="checkbox"/> REFER TO PROB <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER				75. MIRANDA YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> DATE: BY: TIME:		76. INVOKED? <input type="checkbox"/>	

Some agencies combine incident reports with arrest reports to eliminate redundancy and save the writer time. Others might mandate that officers complete both incident and arrest reports separately for each incident. Whatever the individual agency procedures, the same report writing fundamentals that apply to investigative reports also apply to arrest reports. Each arrest report must be well written, concise, and clear. It must contain all of the necessary elements and facts to validate the arrest. The primary difference between arrest and incident reports is that arrest reports *are going* to be scrutinized by prosecutors and judges specifically to determine if probable cause existed to justify the arrest, whereas many incident reports do not result in a criminal prosecution. The civil liability for making an unlawful arrest is frequently based solely on the quality of the arrest report. Officers who *fail* to accurately and completely document their actions and observations put themselves and their agency at risk of being found liable for civil damages. The best protection is a complete and thorough investigation that is well documented.

The importance of writing quality reports and narratives cannot be overstated. Officers are frequently assessed and evaluated solely on the basis of their writing ability. Promotions, transfers, and professional reputations often are based on the opinions of superiors and decision makers who may read an incident or supplemental report. An officer never knows who ultimately will read or review his or her work product. An investigative report can find its way into courtrooms, executive offices, and frequently onto the front page of newspapers. A well-written and complete investigative summary demonstrates competence and diligence and is the hallmark of a professional officer. A poorly written or incomplete report could permanently damage an officer's or criminal justice agency's reputation.

TECHNOLOGY AND POLICE REPORTS

The advent and proliferation of computers has changed forever how businesses and governments operate. The speed at which computers can process, organize, store, and transmit data has revolutionized the day-to-day practices of even the most basic private and public functions. Most facets of the criminal justice system have been similarly transformed and improved.

A wide variety of crime-solving technologies has emerged from this period of technological development and innovation. Some of the more significant achievements include automated fingerprint identification systems, DNA databases, crime mapping software, expanded access to criminal records, and the wireless transmission of crime data. These innovations have greatly improved the crime-solving capability of today's law enforcement officer (Foster, 2005). An equally important area of these technological innovations is the increased use of computers to write, store, and transmit incident and arrest reports. According to a 2003 Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics report, the number of police and sheriff's departments that use paper reports as the primary means to transmit criminal incident field data to central information systems has decreased from approximately 87 percent in 1997 to 58 percent in 2003. During these same time periods, the use of computer and data devices for recording and transmitting field data increased from 9 to 38 percent in local police departments and from 7 to 33 percent in sheriff's offices. These numbers illustrate how technology is influencing report writing and police data management capabilities.

The use of mobile computers for law enforcement dates back to the 1970s with the first deployments of **mobile data terminals** (MDTs) and **computer-aided dispatch** (CAD) systems (Brewer, 2007). MDTs were “dumb” terminals, with keyboards and screens, that allowed officers to receive calls for service information from computers housed at a central headquarters. MDTs have no actual computing power but allow officers to access various driver’s license, motor vehicle, and wanted person’s records in the field. CAD systems incorporate software that assists in the management and dispatching of police calls for service (Foster, 2005). These systems allow information related to calls for service to be transmitted directly to the MDT in the officer’s vehicle.

The size and portability of modern computers has made them a mainstay in most police agencies. A full range of law enforcement practices has been adapted to incorporate the use of personal computers and **personal digital assistants** (PDAs). Most police agencies now equip their officers with **mobile data computers** (MDCs). The MDC is a microcomputer, usually a laptop computer, that is installed in the officer’s vehicle. These computers allow the officer to access various databases to query driver’s license, vehicle registration records, and wanted person’s information. Some more advanced systems also have the capability for the officers to view photographs, mug shots, and fingerprints in the field (Foster, 2005).

Many new devices and products have emerged that can assist officers in inputting and formatting reports. The laptop personal computer is probably the best-known technology used by officers to format and record reports. Other smaller devices, such as PDAs, provide the portability that allows officers to use them while working in assignments using motorcycles or bicycles or on horseback. Detectives and crime scene investigators use PDAs at remote crime scenes where a laptop might not be practical (Brewer, 2007). These devices provide the durability and capability for officers to access and input information while in the field to assist in investigations and information gathering (Geohegan, 2009). This information can then be transmitted wirelessly to other users.

As computer technology continues to evolve, the trend is toward smaller, faster, and more powerful machines that have greater capability and flexibility in field use. These laptop computers and PDAs have transformed the way officers organize and input written incident and arrest reports. The concept of creating a technological environment where the officer has all of the equipment needed to complete reports in the field has been referred to as the *mobile office* (Foster, 2005). A mobile office typically consists of a laptop computer, mobile radio, and wireless capability to transmit information. According to Foster, “It has been estimated that mobile office concept can reduce the time a police officer spends in the station on paperwork by 37 percent” (2005, p. 169).

Using Technology for Police Report Writing

A significant portion of officers’ time is spent writing reports. It is estimated that up to 20 percent of a front-line officer’s time is spent completing reports (Brewer, 2007). A wide variety of technology currently exists that allows officers to complete reports electronically. This technology ranges in sophistication from software that allows officers to input data and reports into report form templates that is then printed in paper format, to extensive computer systems that capture, store, and relay data electronically to various locations and users.

Automated Report Writing Systems. Many agencies use **automated field reporting systems (AFRSs)** to allow officers in the field to input incident and crime data. These systems reduce the time required to complete incident reports and improve the quality of data collected in the reports. This allows officers to use MDCs to complete incident reports in the field without leaving their assigned areas (Groff & McEwen, 2008). CAD information can be automatically populated onto an electronic report form on the officer's MDC when a call is dispatched. This ensures the accurate transfer of the information and reduces redundant data entry for the officer (Gavigan, 2008).

These report writing software systems allow officers to input information into reports and conduct data queries of agency records to complete the necessary information. Once the report has been completed it can be electronically transmitted to supervisors for review. Once approved, the supervisor can then route the report to the appropriate sections of the agency (e.g., records, court liaison, investigations).

Records Management Systems. Many police agencies use a **records management system (RMS)** to automate the processes of data entry, storage, retrieval, and sharing of information about persons, vehicles, wanted persons, and other records (Groff & McEwen, 2008). More advanced jurisdictions use an integrated system or criminal justice information system, which allows the report to be routed electronically to other outside agencies (e.g., the prosecutor's office, the jail, or court systems) (Foster, 2005). These systems automate and streamline the report writing process and allow for a more efficient dissemination of information to various users and criminal justice stakeholders.

These integrated report writing and records management systems represent the state of the art in law enforcement information management systems (Gavigan, 2008). The technology needed to support these integrated systems can be very sophisticated. They rely on multiple components all working in combination to be effective. Not all criminal justice agencies use these more advanced systems. The cost of hardware and software to support these systems can make them prohibitive for smaller or budget-constrained agencies.

Report Writing Software Some police and correctional agencies use laptop or desktop computers only as word processors to assist officers in completing incident or arrest reports. This use of technology greatly increases the speed at which officers can complete investigations, and improves the appearance and organization of reports. A wide variety of report formats can be developed using word processing software such as WordPerfect or Microsoft Word. These **report writing software** programs allow the officer to input information and narrative summaries into a standard template or format. Different templates can be created for a variety of incident types. These templates typically use a combination of the fill-in-the-blank, open box type, or check the box formats to enter data. Some templates can incorporate pull-down menus to assist the officer in making a selection from a group of choices. Many of these report templates use a tabbed or window design to allow the writer to navigate from one area of the report to another and input information into the correct section. These sections are typically related to persons, vehicles, evidence, or other property associated with the investigation. The tabbed or windows design allows for more space to document and describe these items, and produces a more complete but less cluttered final report. A free-form narrative section is provided to allow for a detailed written synopsis of the investigation or incident.

Report writing software products typically provide spelling and grammar checks that can aid the writer in the proper formation and editing of reports. Once all of the information is entered and formatted, the completed report can be saved onto a storage device or printed as hard copy. It can then be disseminated as needed to supervisors for approval or other components of the system. The main advantage that these systems share is that they allow the writer to save and revise drafts and versions of a report for later editing and correction.

Other Police Report Writing Technologies

Most of the traditional word processing products used in personal computers use a keyboard as the point of data entry. Many agencies have sought out solutions that can speed up report writing without sacrificing the quality of the report. Dictation is another faster way to enter data into a report. This method has been in use for some time in law enforcement, but recent advancements have changed the way it can be used to write reports. The advancements in smaller digital recorders have made them very practical for officers and investigators to record narratives and interviews for transcription to reports or witness statements. The recording quality of these devices makes them much more effective than older analog tape recorders for capturing and dictating information (Dees, 1999).

Some agencies have implemented automated dictation reporting systems for report writing. These systems provide the officer with a mechanism to call into a computer via telephone and dictate the report. The system is equipped with software that converts voice to transcribed text. Other systems use transcription specialists who manually enter the report data into the system as the officer dictates the report to them. These systems save the officer time that would be spent writing, but require a significant amount of logistical support to operate efficiently. They also require the officer to review the completed report once it is transcribed, checking for accuracy and completeness and making corrections. As digital recording technology has improved and the cost of these systems has decreased, more agencies have sought out this solution as a time-saving measure for officers (Dees, 1999).

Several emerging technologies have been developed to allow more flexibility in getting data into a report form. These technologies allow the officer to electronically “write” with a stylus or smart pen onto a computer touch screen or prepared surface. The device then transforms the script into text. Others use an **intuitive pen** which captures the data as the officer writes on any surface and then downloads the data into the computer via a docking station (Dees, 2005). These systems transfer the data electronically into a format that can be recognized by the computer and convert it to text. This allows the writer to use freehand writing to input the data. The method allows officers to capture and record information with greater speed and ease (Simon, 2005).

Another technology that has greatly influenced how officers investigate crimes and identify suspects is the use of video evidence. The proliferation of video monitoring systems in businesses and public areas has provided police agencies with valuable evidence of criminal activity and has helped identify and prosecute offenders. In-car video systems in patrol cars have been used in law enforcement since the 1970s for traffic enforcement, but the advances in this technology and the value to agencies for public integrity issues have greatly increased their use in recent years. Officers must be trained to accurately and completely transfer the actions from video into the narrative body of their reports. The reality of using this evidence is

Computer technology has greatly enhanced the report writing capability of police officers.

Source: © Mikael Karlsson



that a picture is worth a thousand words; however, the officer must document the actions occurring on the video images for them to be used in court. If the officer's account of the video evidence differs from what appears in the video, the evidence may be deemed worthless or the officer's testimony may be discredited.

All of these technologies are designed to increase an officer's capability to complete well-written and thorough reports in a timely manner. They each have distinct advantages and limitations, but all rely on a well-trained and capable officer who is able to capture ideas and information and relate them in a meaningful way. No technology can take the place of a human being inputting the data or writing the narratives.

chapter summary

1. One of the most important aspects of police and correctional work is report writing. Unfortunately, most television shows and movies about law enforcement provide little or no emphasis on the kinds of writing or the amount of writing necessary in police and correctional work. Good writing is an essential skill for any law enforcement professional to master and continually improve on.
2. A well-written report can assist a prosecutor in obtaining a conviction, while a poorly written report can be used by the defense to suggest sloppy police work, or confused thinking on the part of an arresting or investigating officer.
3. Police and correctional writing is not designed to entertain, or even be terribly creative, but rather to communicate necessary pieces of information that may be important later during a secondary investigation—or if the case goes to court, during prosecution.
4. Police and correctional reports document criminal or, in some cases, rule-violating incidents. They may be used to maintain a record of investigative tasks as they are accomplished during that segment of the event, and to accurately record what transpired for other pertinent criminal justice partners who need to know the facts of the incident.

5. Proper spelling is an important part of report writing. Misspelled words can make an otherwise well-written report look unprofessional or incomplete. The use of police jargon in a report is another way to reduce the value of a report. Jargon can confuse the non-police officer reading the report and make the report difficult to follow or understand.
6. Three major tenses tend to be used in police and correctional report writing: present, past, and future. Present tense involves a construction describing a current event or occurrence. Past tense involves a construction describing something that has occurred already. Future tense involves a construction where something is described as occurring later or at some time in the future.
7. Writing in an active voice allows the reader to understand who did what to whom. In other words, when the subject of a sentence is in action (acts or performs some activity), the verb is in active voice. When the subject of the sentence is the recipient of some action, the verb is in the passive voice.
8. Pronouns are words that are used to take the place of, or to refer back to, nouns or some other pronoun. Pronouns permit us to speak about people, places, and things without unnecessary repetition.
9. Gender neutrality refers to language that neither stereotypes either sex nor appears to be referring to only one sex when that is not the writer's intention. Officers should use gender-neutral writing in their reports to avoid stereotyping subjects or influencing the meaning or tone of their words.
10. More is not necessarily better in police report writing. Police writing should be clear and concise. Adding unnecessary words or legal terminology only bores or confuses the reader. Effective writers stick to the facts and include only details or information that add clarity and value to the report.
11. Police and correctional agencies use a wide variety of reports depending on the nature of their work. These include incident or complaint, supplemental, and arrest reports. Each agency modifies these reports to meet its individual needs and purpose.
12. The advent and proliferation of computers has changed how police agencies operate and capture information. Today, laptop computers are standard issue for most law enforcement agencies. They are used to complete reports and transmit data to records management systems that then transfer information to other criminal justice partners electronically.

Exercises: Writing a Good Narrative

exercise 1

WRITING AN ARREST REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS: Draft a narrative report using the following facts:

Case number:	2009-20345
Date and time of incident:	October 23, 2009, 1400 hours
Nature of incident:	Theft
Location:	Save-a-lot Grocery, 456 W. Main Street, Anytown, MN
Reporter:	Joe Sanderson, White/Male, DOB: 09-22-56, home address: 1235 47th Street, Anytown, MN
Witness #1:	Mary Franks, White/Female, DOB: 12-23-82, home address: 4322 Duncan Place, Anytown, MN
Witness #2:	Marcus Henry, Black/Male, DOB: 10-03-92, home address: 6601 Masters Avenue, Apartment 33B, Anytown, MN
Suspect:	Barbara Mills Jones, White/Female, 01-20-84, home address: 33 Whisper Hills Place, Apartment 5A, Anytown, MN
Evidence:	1 six-pack of 12-oz cans of Budweiser beer, valued at \$7.36, 3 packages of sirloin steaks valued at \$26.98

Facts of the incident:

Mr. Sanderson, who is the store manager, was told by one of his employees, Mary Franks, that she saw a woman stuffing packages of meat inside a baby carriage. Another employee, Marcus Henry, watched the woman walk out of the store, pushing the baby carriage without paying for the meat. Mr. Sanderson ran out into the parking lot and stopped the woman. He recovered three packages of meat and a six-pack of beer from the baby carriage.

When you arrive at 1415, Ms. Jones and Mr. Sanderson are in the manager’s office. Ms. Jones is sobbing and visibly upset. She admits to stealing the meat and beer because she says that her husband left her and she has nothing to eat. She has a seven-month-old baby, Margaret Jones, DOB 03-15-09, in the baby carriage.

Mr. Sanderson, Mr. Henry, and Ms. Franks provide you with written statements of what they saw. Mr. Sanderson indicates that the store policy is to prosecute all shoplifters. You arrest Ms. Jones and drive her to the Anytown Municipal Jail. Child welfare advocates are notified and take custody of Margaret Jones. The meat and beer are inventoried, photographed, and released back to Sanderson.

exercise 2

WRITING AN INCIDENT REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS: Draft a narrative report using the following facts:

- Case number: CI 2009-49991
- Date and time of incident: October 25, 2009, 1730 hours
- Nature of incident: Inmate stabbing
- Location: Middleburg Correctional Facility, Hallway between Building 2A and the Mess Hall
- Reporting officer: C/O David Morris
- Victim: Marcus Davidson #99872
- Witness #1: Sergeant Mary Faulkner
- Witness #2: C/O John Brown
- Witness #3: Inmate Curtis Smith #34790
- Witness #4: Inmate Brandon Fields #56912
- Suspect: Inmate Darius Prentice #44551
- Evidence: 4-inch homemade metal shank knife wrapped with tape
- Injuries: 2-inch stab wound to the lower left back

Facts of the incident:

Several inmates from Building 2A were being escorted back to their cell block from the Mess Hall by C/O Brown, Sgt. Faulk, and C/O Morris. Inmate Davidson was walking between inmates (Smith and Fields) in a single-file line. They passed another group of inmates heading into the Mess Hall. Inmate Prentice was walking in the hallway toward the Mess Hall when he lunged at Davidson and stabbed him in the lower back with a small knife. Inmates Smith and Fields restrained Prentice until Faulkner and Brown could take him into custody. The knife was recovered by C/O Morris, who also responded to the scene. Davidson was taken to the infirmary with a non-life-threatening wound. Prentice was placed in lockdown pending further investigation.

exercise 3

WRITING A COMPLAINT REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS: Draft a narrative report using the following facts:

- Case number: 2009-20677
- Date and time of incident: October 25, 2009, 1830 hours
- Nature of incident: Residential burglary
- Location: 344 Marshal Street, Anytown MN
- Reporter: Barry Myers, White/Male, DOB: 04-12-53, home address: 344 Marshal Street, Anytown, MN
- Witness: Mildred Pierce, White/Female, DOB: 02-23-42, home address: 342 Marshal Street, Anytown, MN
- Suspect: Unknown at this time
- Evidence: Concrete block, possible blood evidence

Facts of the incident:

You respond to a residence at 344 Marshal Street. The homeowner, Mr. Barry Myers, meets you at the curb and advises that his house has been broken into today. He estimates sometime between 8:30 a.m. when he left for work and 6:00 p.m. when he arrived home.

Mr. Myers walks you to the back of his home and shows you a bedroom window that has been broken and is pushed open. When you look through the window you see broken glass inside the room and what appears to be a piece of concrete block on the floor. Mr. Myers says that he had some lose blocks sitting next to the house from a building project he was finishing.

You search the interior of the house and find that several rooms have been ransacked and the contents of drawers and cabinets have been strewn throughout the home. At the bedroom windowsill, where the window was broken, you see drops of what appear to be blood on the inside of the sill and on the carpet below.

Mr. Myers advises that he has no idea what exactly has been taken and will have to do an inventory of his belongings to find out. Mr. Myers says that his neighbor Mrs. Pierce is a retiree who stays home during the day. She might have seen or heard something.

Mrs. Pierce says that she saw an old beatup brown work truck parked in Mr. Myers’s driveway at around 11:00 this morning. Two men were driving the truck and they stayed at Myers house for about 15 to 20 minutes. She thought they were a lawn service since they were walking all around the house.

exercise 4

WRITING A SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS: Draft a narrative supplemental report using the following facts:

Case number: 2009-20677
Date and time of incident: October 26, 2009, 1730 hours
Nature of incident: Follow to residential burglary
Location: 344 Marshal Street, Anytown, MN
Reporter: Barry Myers, White/Male, DOB: 04-12-53, home address: 344 Marshal Street, Anytown, MN
Witness: Fred Johnson, White/Male, DOB: 05-23-62, home address: 346 Marshal Street, Anytown, MN

Stolen property:

- 1 Remington, .30-06 rifle, serial #R124392, value \$600.00
- 1 Glock , 9 mm, semiautomatic pistol, serial #B234678, value \$500
- 1 Dell laptop computer, serial #D33457HVC25790, value \$1,200
- \$230 in cash

You are called back to the scene of the prior burglary by Mr. Myers. He has completed a detailed inventory of his belongings and provides you with the descriptions of the stolen items. He has also located another witness, Mr. Johnson, who came home for lunch at around 11:15 a.m. and saw a brown landscaping truck parked in his neighbor’s driveway. He was suspicious so he wrote down on a piece of paper the name of the landscaping company visible on the side of the truck.

glossary terms

Active voice	6	Mobile data computer (MDC)	17
Arrest report	13	Mobile data terminal (MDT)	17
Automated field reporting system (AFRS)	18	Passive voice	6
Computer-aided dispatch (CAD)	17	Personal digital assistant (PDA)	17
Corpus delicti	3	Pronoun agreement	7
Excessive verbiage	8	Record-keeping system	4
First-person writing	7	Records management system (RMS)	18
Gender neutrality	8	Report writing software	18
Incident/complaint report	10	Supplemental report	13
Intuitive pen	19	Third-person writing	7
Jargon	6	Verb tense	6
Legalese	8		