



Report Writing for Security Personnel

By Brian S. Williams – Founder / Director of Training Services at

Grey Wolf Consulting, LLC

www.greywolfconsulting.us

Introduction

Within security, report writing represents perhaps one of the most important responsibilities of the security professional.

A security officer may observe an incident that lasts only a few minutes, but the written report may be reviewed days, months, or even years later. Supervisors, managers, clients, insurance companies, attorneys, law-enforcement personnel, or courts may rely on the information contained in a security report to understand what happened and it is for this reason, a security report must be accurate, objective, complete, clear, and professional.

The Purpose of a Security Report

A security report serves several important purposes including:

- 1. Documentation - Represents a permanent record of an incident, activity, condition, or observation.**
- 2. Communication - Allows for information to be passed on to all relevant individuals.**
- 3. Investigation - Reports can provide important information to supervisors, management, law enforcement, or investigators.**
- 4. Evidence - A properly prepared report may later become an important piece of evidence in an investigation or legal proceeding.**
- 5. Accountability - Reports document the actions taken by security personnel and establish a timeline of events.**
- 6. Risk Management - Repeated reports may reveal patterns or security vulnerabilities that management can address.**

The Most Important Rule of Report Writing

Within a security report, always and only write only what you know to be accurate and factual. Never assume! While it is acceptable to include personal suspicions related to an event, such speculations must be clearly indicated as such and never presented as facts.

A security report should clearly distinguish between:

- 1. What was observed.**
- 2. What was heard.**
- 3. What was reported.**
- 4. What action was taken.**
- 5. What the officer believes or suspects.**

The Five W's and One H

A well known and frequently used method for organizing a report is known as the Five W's and One H:

1. **Who was involved?**
2. **What happened?**
3. **When did it happen?**
4. **Where did it happen?**
5. **Why did it happen, if known?**
6. **How did it happen?**

It is important to understand and remember that not every report will contain an answer to each of these questions and if something is unknown, it should be stated as such and again never make an assumption.

Observation vs. Assumption

Another critical component within a professional report is Observation vs. Assumption. As stated earlier, NEVER assume details. Always know what you are reporting as you may be called to explain the details in the future.

The following is an example of the difference between these two principles:

Observation

I observed the individual placing the item within their backpack.

Assumption

The individual was attempting to steal the item.

As can be seen, the first statement describes what was observed, while the second attempts to interpret the individual's intent and call for speculation of the event.

Statements Made by Others

Security officers will often receive information from employees, visitors, witnesses, or other security personnel. Because of this, when documenting another person's statement, it is critical to identify the source of the information, as this will make it clear that the security officer did not personally observe the event but rather was informed of the circumstances afterwards.

Whenever reporting a statement from a third party, the exact words are extremely important and the use of quotation marks will help ensure that the statement is accurate. Never change someone's statement to make it sound better or more professional, their words are their words. However to protect the security officer's professionalism, always add quotation marks around a witness statement.

Use Clear and Professional Language

A security report should always be written in plain, professional language. Avoid using slang terms, text message abbreviations, excessive technical terminology or unnecessary personal comments. At times, there will be a need to document profane or offensive language, particularly when recording a statement from a witness. At these times, ALWAYS ensure that you enclose these comments in quotations.

A Security Report Should Be Written in Chronological Order

A method which helps the reader understand the incident more clearly is when it is structured in such a way as to allow for a flow of information from the beginning until the conclusion.

To achieve this objective, the report should be written starting with what was occurring before the incident, followed immediately by what was the first observations made. After these two principles are written, move on to the actual incident, including the following:

1. **The Incident** - What happened?
2. **The Initial Response** - What actions did the officer take?
3. **What if any Notifications Were Made** - Who was contacted?
4. **What was the Final Outcome** - What happened afterward?
5. **Was Any Evidence Preserved** - CCTV, physical evidence, or other documentation?

Accuracy Is More Important Than Speed

While reports should be always completed promptly, one should never sacrifice accuracy for speed. Before submitting a report, review it for errors including:

1. **Are all names spelled correctly?**
2. **Are all the dates correct?**
3. **Are the times correct?**
4. **Are all the locations correct?**
5. **Are witness statements accurately recorded?**
6. **Is the sequence of events accurate?**
7. **Is the spelling and grammar correct?**
8. **Was any information missed?**
9. **Are there any contradictions?**

Corrections to official reports should always be made whenever possible before submission, and in the event that a error is found after submission, a supplemental report should be generated outlining and correcting the error only.

The Use of Field Notebooks by Security Personnel

A field notebook is perhaps one of the most useful and important tools a security officer can carry, as it provides a reliable way to record observations, times, descriptions, statements, actions, and other important details as they occur and not try to rely solely on memory alone.

Although electronic reporting systems are now within wider use, a field notebook remains valuable because it allows an officer to document information immediately, particularly when responding to an incident or conducting routine patrols.

The purpose of a field notebook is to preserve accurate information that may later be used to prepare a formal security report. It is not a replacement for an official incident report but rather a tool that helps ensure the final report is complete, accurate, and based on recorded observations rather than memory alone.

What Should Be Recorded in a Field Notebook?

Depending on the circumstances, a security officer may need to record the following information:

1. **Date and time** – The date and the time an observation or event occurred.
2. **Location** – Identification of the specific building, floor, entrance, room, parking area, or other relevant location.
3. **Observations** – Record what you observed, heard, or smelled.
4. **Descriptions** – Document relevant physical descriptions, clothing, vehicles, property, or other identifying details.
5. **Statements** – Record important statements made by witnesses, employees, visitors, or other individuals. Use quotation marks when recording exact words.
6. **Actions taken** – Document what actions you took in response to the incident.
7. **Notifications** – Record who was contacted, when the notification occurred.
8. **Evidence and follow-up** – Note the existence and location of relevant CCTV footage, photographs, physical evidence, witnesses, or other records.

The amount of detail recorded will depend on the circumstances. However, entries should be sufficiently clear that the officer can later understand what occurred without having to rely entirely on memory.

Field Notebooks Must Be Accurate, Clear, and Professional

A field notebook should be treated as a professional record, not as a place for casual comments, personal opinions, or unsupported conclusions. Entries should be factual, legible, and written in clear language.

This distinction helps ensure that information received from others is not mistakenly presented as something the officer personally witnessed. Remember that the security officer's notebook can in some cases actually become and be used as official evidence.

Maintain the Integrity of Your Notebook

Field notebooks may be reviewed by supervisors, investigators, management, legal representatives, or other authorized personnel. They should therefore be maintained in a manner that preserves the integrity of the recorded information.

1. **NEVER remove pages, destroy entries, or conceal information. If for any reason a page must be removed, a report outlining the reason should be generated, attached to the notebook and taken out of service.**
2. **Keep notebooks secure and protect confidential or personal information from unauthorized access.**
3. **If a notebook is lost, stolen, damaged, or otherwise compromised, the officer should report the matter in accordance with company policy.**

Report-Writing Formula

A method to help ensure a professional report is the use of the following formula:

FACTS + TIME + LOCATION + ACTION + RESULT

1. **Facts: What was observed?**
2. **Time: When was it observed?**
3. **Location: Where was it observed?**
4. **Action: What if any action was taken?**

By adhering to these principles, the security report should be easy to read, understand and assist in the conclusion of a situation.

In Conclusion

In the end, professional report writing is a fundamental skill for every security officer and a well written report should allow a supervisor, manager, investigator, police officer, attorney, or other authorized reader to understand what happened, when it happened, where it happened, who was involved, what the officer observed, what actions were taken, and what happened afterward.

Remember a security officer's report is more than paperwork. It is a professional record of the officer's observations and actions.

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About the Author

Brian S. Williams is a professional firearms instructor, tactical trainer, and executive security consultant with greater than 35 years of experience in firearms instruction, use-of-force training, and protective operations. As the founder of several firearms training and security organizations, he has developed and delivered firearms, tactical, and instructor certification programs for civilians, law enforcement officers, military personnel, and licensed security professionals throughout the United States.

Over the course of his career, Mr. Williams has trained and certified more than 10,500 Connecticut pistol permit applicants, instructed more than 2,000 civilians and hundreds of law enforcement and security professionals in advanced firearms and tactical applications, and provided remedial firearms training to military and correctional personnel. He served as a Marine Police Officer and Watch Commander with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and was appointed to the Connecticut State Police Firearms Advisory Council, where he contributed to firearms training and policy discussions.

Mr. Williams holds numerous professional certifications, including NRA Training Counselor, NRA Law Enforcement Firearms Instructor, General Dynamics Simunitions FX™ Instructor, The Heckler & Koch International Training Division and Sig Sauer Academy Instructor certifications, and USCCA Concealed Carry and Home Defense Instructor. He is the author of *Welcome to the Real World: A Dangerous Place to Be Caught Unprepared* and has been recognized as an expert in firearms by the Connecticut Superior Courts. His work continues to emphasize responsible firearms ownership, sound judgment, lawful use of force, and practical, reality-based training.