

Incident report writing – A guide.

The Use of written information by Security personal.

There will always be a need for security staff to compile written documentation as an integral part of the role they perform. Incident reports, notebook entries and witness statements all form an integral part of the job.

Effective Report Writing

When you write the report you are writing it for an individual that was neither present nor possibly aware that an event took place.

An incident report is not a “write-up” The incident report is an official document describing in best detail the facts of an incident and as such may be produced in legal proceedings that may ensue following the event.

You thus need to present the information in such a way that ensures the recipient (the reader) will understand what occurred, when it occurred, who was involved and any actions taken.

Please Note: If you are unsure about whether or not to complete an incident report, write one!

Cause of Incident:

If you do not feel that you have factual information, you may state your opinion provided that you indicate that it is your opinion and not fact. Even if the actual cause of an incident remains unknown after you have attempted to determine it, you should provide as much information as you have concerning what happened prior to the event/during the event as this may provide a clue to the reader. If you did not actually witness the incident or event, you may still write an Incident Report; however, be sure to state that the information is based on what was reported to you and by whom it was reported.

Reliability of your observation:

When writing your report, use terms that are specific and clearly describe the behavior that occurred. For example, don't use generalities such as the man was aggressive / upset / agitated, state the actual behavior that you observed that made you believe the man was being aggressive, was upset or agitated. This could include the actual words used, Body language and specific behaviour. For example writing 'Mr X shouted he was going to “rip off my fucking head off and shit in my neck” this led me to believe he was in an aggressive state of mind' is better than 'Mr X acted aggressively towards me'

Objectivity:

When writing your report, be sure that you have not allowed an earlier situation or prior information to influence your perception of the current incident. You are writing your report as a recorder, not as a judge.

Consequently, be sure that your report is free from judgmental statements, sarcasm, or condescending comments. Again, it is advisable that you re-read your completed Incident Report to assure that you have written what you really intended to say.

The secret of report writing is to present your information in a form which can be easy to read, emphasises the key points and clearly identifies what occurred.

There are two main aspects to achieving this they being the **style** and **structure** of the report.

Style

A useful approach to getting the style right is to consider the 'Cs' :

Clear Clarity is achieved through the use of the right language – words that the reader will understand. Take your reader through the points one by one, so that each leads on to the next.

Concise Being concise means keeping the report as short as possible. Being concise or brief does not necessarily mean simply stating the base points. The use of explanations can contribute to clarifying the key issues and should be used if appropriate. However, the essence is to stick to the point and not over-elaborate.

Correct	The information conveyed must be as accurate as possible at the time of writing.
Consistent	The flow of language is aided by consistency in its use, such as standardising the use of person and tense in verbs, and sticking to a particular style and tone throughout.
Convincing	It is important to show confidence and commitment in what you write. Doubt, ambiguity and vagueness come through very clearly in all forms of communication including written.

Structure

Virtually all communications can be structured along the same overall lines. A very basic outline which works nearly all the time is:

- Say what you are going to say / Set the scene.
- Say it.
- Say that you've said it.

These points are introduced in the following format:

- Introduction (say what you are going to say / set the scene)
- Middle - Body of the communication (say it)
- Summary/conclusion (say that you've said it)

Introduction

The first sentence sets the tone and style for the rest of the report and you should give that some thought. Often getting that first sentence right sparks off the flow of language for the rest of the communication.

The introduction sets the scene. It directs the reader to what is going to be said and importantly, how it will be said (the general approach, tone, etc.). Thus, an introduction needs to cover the background to the incident, why it is being dealt with and briefly, what is to come.

Middle Section

The main body of the communication conveys the information. If necessary this should itself be structured into short paragraphs, headings etc.

Conclusion

Including a summary at the end is a useful means of bringing together the various points made in a concise way.

We can develop this basic structure in rather more detail to describe a recommended form of Incident report as follows.

At the header the report should identify the following key points:

The title for the report.

Police Log number (if any).

By whom the report is written.

The date / time the report was written.

The authority under which it is written – your role/position.

The reference of the report - for filing

Introduction

In your introduction, you should make the purpose and objectives of the report clear. You will need to provide a short description, no more than a paragraph, of the incident (such as the type / name of premises and any other general issues which set the scene). Then briefly identify the incident you are addressing it is also useful to set out here any general legal aspects of health and safety, Licensing law or other legislation which apply directly to the incident.

Main Body

The main body of the incident report should state the facts simply, one point at a time and in a logical sequence of events starting with '**what**' questions and then working through **where**, **when**, **how** and **who** before ending with the **why** questions.

So with that in mind the main body of your report would run as follows:

- ‘What’** - What happened? – What did you see? – What time was it?
- ‘Where’** - Where were you at the time? – Where was the victim? Where were others?
- ‘When’** - When did you realise something was wrong?
- ‘How’** - How did it happen? – How were you involved? – How did you respond
- ‘Who’** - Who else was involved? – Who else saw it? – Who reported it?
- ‘Why’** - Why do you think it happened?

Conclusion.

The conclusion to your report should simply draw together the main points, this is useful in a lengthy incident report, and make any recommendations. Never introduce new information at this stage – everything in your conclusion must be backed up by the information in the main body of the report.

The report can close with your recommendations for further action this applies more when you are dealing with a potential Health and safety incident. Each recommendation should be clearly explained and realistic – stating recommendations, where possible, for dealing with both the immediate and underlying cause of the incident.

Where there is a choice of courses of action you should make it clear which you favour and why.

Take notes during incidents or as soon as is practicable afterwards, pay particular attention to descriptions of persons involved. Note clothing, manor, actions and any specific words used by individuals in the build up to and during the incident.

Key points to recall when describing a person or vehicle

Description of Person(s)

- Ethnicity
- Male / Female
- Age: An approximation will suffice.
- Body Shape: Size, height, weight, build
- Was the person carrying anything?

Predominant features:

- Ears: Size, shape
- Eyes: Colour, shape, glasses
- Mouth / Nose: Size, shape (nostrils)
- Hair / Facial Hair: Colour, length, texture, hairline, clean-shaven, bearded or mustache
- Complexion: Skin colour, texture, pores, pockmarks, acne, rashes, scars, birthmarks, bumps, dimples, clefts

Dress:

- Shirt / Blouse / Dress: Colour, pattern, design, sleeves, collar
- Coat: Colour, style, length
- Trousers / Skirt: Colour, pattern, design, length, cuffs
- Footwear: Type (shoes, trainers, boots) Colour, pattern, style, clean / dirty
- Piercing / Tattoos: Shapes, size, colour, location on body
- General Appearance: Neat, sloppy, clean, dirty
- Accessories: Purse, briefcases, backpacks, packages
- Jewelry: Rings, watches, bracelets, earrings, necklaces
- Hat: Colour, style, how was it worn

Speech:

- Any ‘Direct speech’ particularly foul language or threats should be recorded in the pocket book. Use the actual words, If the person shouts abuse record the words actually used not just ‘He swore at the doorman’

Description of Vehicle(s)

- Make
- Model
- Licence Plate Number
- Colour

- Body Damage
- Wheels / Hub Caps
- Number of people in the vehicle
- Driver
- Markings / Window Stickers