Indiana Law Enforcement Academy

Basic Report Writing Course

Student Manual

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Prepared by
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# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction to Course**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. A Message to New Officers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Why Develop These Skills?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. General Course Objectives for Students</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Overview of Course (syllabus)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 2**

**Class Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Due for Hour 1 – No Homework Due</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Due for Hour 2 – No Homework Due</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Due Before Hour 3 – Homework #1, 2, 3 &amp; 4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Due Before Hour 4 – No Homework Due</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Due Before Hour 5 – Homework #5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Due Before Hour 6 – No Homework Due</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Due Before Hour 7 – Homework #7, 8 &amp; 9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Due Before Hour 8 – Homework #10 &amp; 11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Read: Written Statements (Hour 5)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Read: Brevity material (Hour 3)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Read: Written Statements (Hour 4)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Read: The CYA Class (Hour 7)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Read: Wrapping It All Up (Hour 8)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Read: Psychological Aspects (Hour 6)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. Read: Arrest Reports (Hour 7)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Read: Written Statements (Hour 5)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 3**

**Preparing for the Exams**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Course Study Guide for Multiple Choice Exam</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Checklist &amp; Study Guide for the Written Final Exam</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Glossary</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Student Quick Reference Outline</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 4**

**Starting a Writing Improvement Program at Your Dept.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Philosophy and Approach</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. A Five Step Program</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. CYA, Writing Your Way Out of a Career-ending Situation</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. A Report Writing Critical Case Checklist</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix A**

**Sample Arrest Reports**

**Appendix B**

**Course Report Forms**
Chapter 1

Introduction to Course

A Message to New Officers

Why Develop These Skills?

Course Objectives for Students

Overview Syllabus
Most police officers, new or veteran, do not like to write. Officers are, by nature, action oriented. They are guards, sentinels and warriors. But what good are you, as an officer, if you save a woman from a deranged boyfriend who kills her the following day because your report was insufficient to keep him in jail? What good is apprehending a bank robber when your report brings into question what should have been a pristine chain of custody or a rock solid justification for seizing crucial evidence? In short, what good is the authority given you, if you cannot fulfill its purpose?

When you take the oath, you accept a mission! That mission is to save lives and help people. You must become more than you are now to accomplish this. You come into the occupation with abilities given you at birth, but these are not enough.

You must start by developing these simple abilities first into skills and then into full talents. Consequently, some things you must accomplish early in your career require much. Learning to write high quality reports is one of those things. Drive and desire are more important here than prior education or initial ability. Most new officers can absolutely master the skills needed for becoming highly competent report writers.

The fact is that the skill-set for becoming a top-notch police report writer is considerably different than for becoming a novelist, technical writer or journalist. A new officer need not be an English major or Ph.D. to be a highly successful police report writer, capable of sending many robbers, thieves and murderers to prison.

A ROADMAP FOR SUCCESS:

Unfortunately, rules and practices on such things as split infinitives, use of gerunds, dangling participles and a host of other scary sounding terms were originally made to help writers organize and understand the English language. However, these rules often become heavy anchors to the average writer. There is a point at which rules, made to understand concepts, seem to become more important than actually writing. Perhaps the best advice is just to begin writing with, as they say, a clean slate.

At the other end of the process, we complete our reports thinking that we know exactly what we have said rather than truly perceiving what we have actually written. An officer must proofread every official sentence he writes. If this is done in an honest, detached manner—without infusing a bunch of preconceptions and prejudices—we can usually hear or feel most of the grammatical or logical mistakes we have made even if we do not know the technical names for these mistakes.

Revising your report is the key to good report writing. If something does not sound just exactly right or reads a little “bumpy,” CHANGE IT!

Of course, other writing challenges also loom large for new report writer, but relatively simple solutions—several of which we will discuss in class—are often available as well. When officers finally realizes that “content” is the important element for writing really good police reports, then officers can become the stellar report writers that their departments need.

Session 209 et seq.
Why Develop These Skills?

On the previous page, we discussed why officers should develop their report writing skills to benefit the profession. Beyond progressing law enforcement as a profession, officers often have a difficult time justifying to themselves why they should make the effort to develop in this demanding area. Everyone is aware that we write reports 1.) to document the facts of an incident. Reports are also worthwhile for 2.) refreshing memory and 3.) for encouraging professional demeanor (you must report on yourself, how you performed at an incident).

However, these three reasons are not generally the reasons that motivate new officers to put extra effort into creating better reports. There are, nevertheless, at least three other reasons that are highly relevant for creating really good reports, even as viewed from a new officer’s perspective. These are:

1. **Good reports help protect officers from civil liability, public ridicule, unjustified discipline and termination.**
   
   In today’s culture of questioning everything, police officers are routinely “called on the carpet” for their actions. Two officers with equally high level tactical skills or decision-making abilities will not likely be evaluated as equally creditable by jurors or the media if one exhibits low level writing skills compared to another’s high level skills. The old saying that, “If it wasn’t written down, it didn’t happen” might more accurately be stated, “If it wasn’t written down, it didn’t happen that way.”

2. **Consistent, proper bragging within an officer’s routine reports is probably the best technique for obtaining early promotion or special duty assignments, or for recognition from prosecutors and judges.**
   
   Many times, police officers perform at very high levels on the street but their exemplary responses are not recognized by supervisors because officers so often work alone or with other officers of their own rank. The only way most supervisors learn of these events is through the officer’s own report. “Bragging” does not need be boastful, but it should constantly demonstrate that the officer is competent, sensitive and aware of all legal requirements.

3. **Good reports help keep officers out of court.**
   
   Although going to court may be exciting the first couple of times an officer is subpoenaed, an officer quickly finds that sitting in a witness room for hours after a midnight shift, just to have the case continued, is less than rewarding. A good report tells a defense lawyer that this officer will likely hurt his client if put on the stand. A bad report tells a defense attorney that this is just the kind of officer he wants to put on the stand.
Indiana Law Enforcement Academy
Basic Report Writing Course

General Course Objectives for Students

At the end of this course, the student will be able to:

- Identify several important reasons for creating high quality reports, (PO12)
- Identify what types of information should go into field notes and why, (PO 3)
- Take sufficient, accurate field notes for a major felony violation, (PO 2)
- Write reports that identify crucial issues and then focus a reader’s attention on those issues, (PO 1, 4)
- Satisfactorily address all the legal requirements when writing for that particular type of case, (PO 5, 6, 7, 10, 11)
- Write an effective and legally sufficient narrative for an evidence log, (PO 9)
- Assist a witness in producing a written statement using a format and approach that maximizes the effectiveness of that statement, (PO 8)
- Write a legally sufficient probable cause affidavit for arrest as well as for a search warrant, (PO 5, 6)
- Construct a quality arrest report for a complex felony violation using a common word-processing software and a style that is effective for that type of case, (PO 1, 4, 10, 11)
- Use an accepted technique for organizing and sequencing a complex arrest report, (PO 11)
- Incorporate a number of format and writing techniques that make reading a report and finding facts easier, e.g., subdividing a report, using headings, incorporating a lead-in sentence, etc., (PO 1)

*The above POs numbers reference the full Performance Objectives for the course listed in the Instructor Manual and elsewhere.
Overview Syllabus
For the Tier I Basic Report Writing Course

The Student Manual for the Basic Report Writing course can also be found on your issued table or on-line at the following address: www.in.gov/2506.htm

For those who benefit from watching a presentation in addition to reading about a subject, there are several links provided in this manual that have video presentations on these subjects. Mouse over this link while holding down the “Crtl” (Control) button on your computer and then click on the link. If this does not work, you may have to copy and paste the link address into your internet browser.

Class Hour #1 – Class Synopsis: This first class introduces students to the teaching approaches used in this course and to the final examination requirements and video, and the skill of note-taking as well as the “Mind Mapping” technique for organizing a report.

Class Hour #2 – Class Synopsis: This lecture stresses using only the literal meanings of words, i.e., what we call the Accurate Words concept, a difficult undertaking. It also points out how words and phrases can be misleading. The final portion of this class focuses on the homework assignment which begins developing the ability to use precise, detailed descriptions by correcting and improving a supplied Evidence Log. The Final Exam Grading Scale will also be shown during this hour.

Complete Homework Assignments #1, #2, #3 & #4 after Class Hour #2 (see pages 13 & 14 of this manual). The student must read pages 1 – 16 and page 33 before Class Hour #3.

Due Dates Generally:

Each homework assignment (unless a different time is given in class) is due on the Monday evening after the previous class session. For example, if the class session is scheduled for Friday, June 6, 20xx, then the homework assigned is due on Monday, June 9, 20xx. The printed (hardcopy) homework assignments should be submitted in the “Homework” tray at the secretary’s window by the instructor offices. Do not forget to staple you homework sheets together and place your Academy ID number on all pages of your homework assignment. Students should always keep a copy of their homework assignments on their computers in case a submission is lost.

Students may use their department forms for completing homework assignments or the ILEA standardized forms in Appendix B of this manual. The ILEA forms are also available on the computes in the computer lab. After log-in at the computer lab, click the “Basic” folder on the desktop. Then click the Report Writing Forms folder.

Class Hour #3 – Class Synopsis: This class will review, in detail, the principles discussed in the Accurate Words lecture since those principles are the most abstract of the entire course. Several issues will be addressed using examples from the students’ submitted homework papers. The Brevity lecture will then focus further on how to write “Dense” reports. This class is not as abstract as the previous hour but does continue to concentrates on packing as much information into a small area as possible.
Class Hour #4 – Class Synopsis: After presenting a number of techniques in Hour #3, students are given an opportunity to practice these techniques by writing a formal Witness Statement as part of their homework assignment which requires a student to tightly focus a witness’s account of an incident and to present this account in an effective, efficient manner. There will also be a review of a sampling of the students’ prior homework assignments during this class, especially the Evidence Log.

Complete Homework Assignments #5 & #6 after Class Hour #4 (see page 18). The student must read pages 19 – 20 before Class Hour #5.

Class Hour #5 – Class Synopsis: This fifth class hour will briefly review the principles discussed in the Brevity lecture. The Completeness lecture is then presented. It is very legalistic and will focus on correct content when writing affidavits for search and arrest warrants.

Even though this class is quite different from the previous classes—much more of a “nut and bolts” class—this class also demonstrates that the Brevity and Completeness concepts are not totally opposed to each other. In short, brevity does not equal inadequate and completeness does not equal wordy. Content is particularly stressed in this class as it has been found that critical elements are often omitted for these types of reports by new report writers. Students are then given an assignment to write a Probable Cause affidavit. This class lays some important foundational concepts for the Arrest Report class.

Class Hour #6 – Class Synopsis: This class presents the psychological aspects of writing good police reports. Getting the facts correct is only part of the process. Making a report readable, attractive and perhaps even interesting is a bigger challenge.

Complete Homework Assignments #7, #8 and #9 after Class Hour #6 (see pages 21 & 22). The student must read pages 23 – 24 and overview pages 38 - 48 before Class Hour #7. Again, update your Progressive Homework Assignment. A video will be shown at the end of the hour to assist students with completing Homework Assignment #8.

Class Hour #7 – Class Synopsis: This is the Arrest Report class. This class will add several new areas to address and will bring together skills learned in all the previous classes in order to write an effective arrest report for a complex felony case. This class, like the last, will be very legalistic.

Complete Homework Assignment #10 & #11 after Class Period #7 (see page 25). The student must now read pages 26 – 28 and Appendix A before Class Hour #8. Look on page 22 for tips on how to update your Progressive Homework Assignment.

Class Hour #8 – Class Synopsis: This final skills class will address the problem of officers being involved in highly political issues or highly emotional situations that, if not handled well, could result in those officers losing their jobs or being disciplined when the situation is not that severe. This is a class in how officers should document their cases to present their actions in the most honest and favorable light possible. Consequently, this class is titled, “Writing Your Way Out of a Career-ending Situation” or the CYA class and could be the most important class of the course.

Class Hours #9 – Reserved for a course review.

Class Hours #10 – The multiple choice exam

Class Hours #11 & #12 – The Written Final Exam
Chapter 2

Assignments, Materials And Exercises
(by class session)

Introduction to Course
Accurate Words Lecture
Brevity Lecture
Witnesses Statements
Completeness Lecture
The Psychology of Writing Good Police Reports
Arrest Reports
The CYA Class
Course Review
Introduction to Police Report Writing –

In previous years, much emphasis was placed on grammar, spelling and punctuation when conducting a report writing class. Bringing students to a minimum acceptable level in these areas was a difficult task, especially if students were not equipped to handle these skills after 12 years of public school education. In addition, many report writing instructors were not equipped to present these subjects. For an introductory overview, click here: [http://www.webinar.in.gov/p7csf7l7qx2/](http://www.webinar.in.gov/p7csf7l7qx2/)

Now that computers are available virtually everywhere, these spelling, punctuation and grammatical matters are no longer such an overriding issue. This allows students to concentrate on what is the most important element for good police report writing, which is and has always been content.

In short, a case report’s focus—and therefore the resulting content—are different than the focus and content of a witness statement. An evidence log’s focus and content are different than a probable cause affidavit. In fact, the type of material that needs to be included in one arrest report may vary substantially from what the officer should put into the very next arrest report.

Introductory report writing is really a study of how to focus these reports. Consequently, the three most important rules of report writing are: **CONTENT, CONTENT, CONTENT!**

This course employs a barebones lecture format. Each subject is presented giving just enough information to build a foundation. After this groundwork is laid, it is then up to the student to find his or her own way to successfully complete the homework assignments (see the PBL explanation on page 13).

**Note-taking and the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How information –**

This class will examine some basic principles for taking comprehensive notes quickly. The Who, What, Where, When, Why and How approach is a basic framework for good notes-taking.

The Who, What, When … approach really links the field notes process to the case or arrest report. When completing a set of field notes, an officer should ask if he has answered all of these questions. If so, he has a good start on a top notch report. The next step in the process is reorganizing these notes into a better presentation model. This is done in this course by using a Mind Mapping or Webbing technique.

Field Notes: Student need to learn how to quickly take pen and paper field notes even with all of the electronic equipment available today. Electronic recorders can be dropped, fail or have the batteries go dead at the worst possible moment, e.g, a triple homicide.
Accurate Words, Accurate Thoughts, Logical Progressions -

It is often difficult for students to fully grasp the meaning of the “Accurate Words, Accurate Thoughts, Logical Progressions” explanations presented after attending only this class. A student’s typical understanding of these concepts after this class is that one should not write “stupid” things into a report. This is, of course, true but this does not begin to cover the full extent of the subject. These concepts often become more understandable as students progress through the course. In fact, this course makes a full circle by addressing many of the principles presented in this class during the final (CYA) class, Class Hour #8. By that time, many practical uses of these principles become apparent.

This class is really about picking better words to describe a situation. Which words, what phraseology and what progression to use are all critical issues in police report writing. It is this challenge of determining what should go into a particular report and how best to present these issues that will be the real hurdles for new police report writers. The ability to use accurate words is, of course, important in itself, but this concept goes well beyond just picking a barely adequate word. The concept also includes presenting information in a manner that is psychologically appealing to the reader (see Class Hour #6).

Saying that “it is a brown camera case” is more descriptive than saying, “it was a dark in color vinyl bag.” This second description has an element of official cadence that is often attractive to the ear of a new police report writer. It produces a kind of lullaby melody. What is described in the Brevity lecture as “officious language” illustrates even more completely this auditory cadence that is unfortunately often the norm with new report writers.

Writing that “I arrested Brown after he punched me” is more descriptive (and visual) than writing, “I did then and there effect an arrest after the perpetrator became belligerent and assaultive with me.” The second description has a somewhat more “sing-song” and “officious” appeal to the ear, but does not create a strong visual image. Words like forthwith, wherefore, to wit, and heretofore may make the report sound official, but these do little to give a juror a clear picture of what occurred. Even words like “did” and “got” are more placeholder-words than conveyers of deep meanings (thus, the first homework assignment, page 13).

The Accurate Words lecture also includes a section on the concept of writing with absolute honesty. This section demonstrates that this course is comprehensive in its philosophy. It is about more than just placing a few barely accurate words together. It is about the concept of honesty. It is about including all of the required legal justifications and Miranda procedures. This course goes beyond the mere writing skills and incorporates the full package of what needs to go into an effective report. The concept of absolute honesty is just one of these additional areas.

As for logical progressions, a strict chronological format for reporting an incident is certainly a logical approach but not the only logical approach and perhaps not the best approach. With an ultimate goal of writing a report that is understandable to an average juror and that can be read efficiently by a prosecutor or judge, new report writers should occasionally experiment by modifying a strict chronological approach for purposes of creating a better report. For now, however, complete your Homework Assignment #4 using a strict chronological approach. We will experiment with more advanced techniques later.
Tips on Your Homework Assignments (page 13) –

The requirement to rewrite an evidence log narrative is assigned (see Homework Assignment #3) to provide practice in writing very accurate, detailed, concise descriptions and to illustrate the differences between this type of report and a case or arrest report.

In an evidence log, a narrative approach with full, grammatically correct sentences is not necessary but very precise detail is. This homework assignment is really the “poster child” exercise for the Accurate Words lecture. Again, you must determine what your goals are for this report. Then you can focus on how to accomplish these goals. Focus then implicates CONTENT.

More specifically, evidence logs accomplish at least two important goals: 1.) They initially identify the item being collected in sufficient detail so that the officer can honestly identify that item in court to the exclusion of other items that look just like it. 2.) The second important goal that an evidence log accomplishes is establishing at least the first step in the Chain of Custody.

If a pre-printed evidence log does not have a formatted section that shows that the officer turned the item over to the evidence custodian and how it was handled and identified, it is important for the officer to write the descriptive narrative in such a way as to convince the court that not only is this the correct item, but it has not been altered or adulterated through poor custody procedures. This can be done, in part, by including language in the narrative that the item was “… sealed in a plastic evidence bag, marked for identification: MJL, 2016-103a, and submitted to the ABC P.D. evidence custodian,” or similar verbiage.

Conclusions –

“Accurate Words” means more than just picking a somewhat appropriate word. “Accurate Thoughts” means more than just avoiding factual mistakes. “Logical Progression” means more than just plowing through every scenario using a strict timeline approach. Improving police report writing skills means focusing on content and then deciding the best way to present this content.

This means that all arrest reports will not be written or formatted in exactly the same way. This also means that officers must attempt to paint a vivid picture of all critical elements (discussed in the Psychological Aspects class) using techniques that make the reader feel as if he or she is standing at the scene.
Indiana Law Enforcement Academy  
Basic Report Writing Course  
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS  
(Complete prior to Class Hour #3)  

Homework Explanation and Expectations:  
Creating a quality report shows how much effort you put into each call. The report should reflect your professional actions at the scene and not be the toughest part of the call. Your instructor and these homework assignments will demonstrate some ways to create a quality report in the fastest, easiest manner possible. Initially, substantial effort will be necessary, but after a little practice, you will be able to use these techniques in an efficient manner.  

PBL – This course is presented using a modified Problem Based Learning (PBL) approach. As part of this approach, the final exam grading scale and the final exam video are presented at the very beginning of the course. It is then left to the students to figure what skills and knowledge they will need to develop in order to pass the final written exam. When using a PBL approach, conferring with other students, veteran officers, FTOs, investigators or other report writing instructors is encouraged. Use the knowledge of those who are more experienced than you to help you prepare a really professional report. Nonetheless, the final report must be your own! Do not copy someone else’s report.  
Overview of PBL: http://www.webinar.in.gov/p31j4sb9eka/  

Homework Assignment #1:  
Read pages 1 – 16 and page 33 in the Student Manual before Class Hour #3.  

New officers should be aware of “hollow” words and phrases. These are space thieves. They act as place-keepers but add little information to the report. They can usually be replaced easily with more meaningful words. The Accurate Words lecture focuses on how to choose a better word. The words did, got and that are examples of words that often relate little information. Packing more information into a smaller space is worthwhile for a number of reasons. More on these “hollow” words will be revealed in the “Officious Language” lecture. The below exercise is designed to help the officer begin to think about writing an “information dense” report.  
As a first step in learning how to identify and change these space thieves, read the below examples and then modify these six sentences to make each sentence shorter without leaving out any vital information.  

Some Examples: Inclusion of words or phrases such as the suspect did then and there commence … have an official ring to them but create a wordy report without giving much information. Elimination of these words will make writing your reports faster and the final product more understandable.  
The sentence Officer Smith got what the suspect was saying can be improved by replacing the word “got” with a more descriptive word such as the word “understood.” In most sentences, the word “did” can likewise be replaced with a more descriptive word. Sometimes the word that is necessary in a sentence. At other times, it is not. Read the sentence without the word that to see if it makes sense. If it does, eliminate the word that.  

Rewrite and submit the six sentences below using the past tense and first person without using the words did or got. See if you can eliminate the word that in any of the sentences.  

1. At the scene, Taylor Coats did freely speak about how Ripley Torn assaulted him.  
2. Art Decko told me that Ima Crook did then and there confess during their conversation.  
3. Officer Justin Case got the video tape from the evidence locker. (You are Officer Case.)  
4. Miss Trust said that she got Major Discrepancy’s message at 08:45 hours.  
5. Minnie Stonehead finally got what Max I. Que was saying.  
6. Officer A. Stoot and Officer B. Liggerent did receive the completed documents, to wit: the search warrant affidavit and the arrest warrant affidavit.  

Purpose – To recognize and remove useless or confusing words.
Homework Assignment #2: Use a Mind Mapping (or Webbing) technique (as described in class) to convert your field notes for the final exam Superette Robbery case to a more organized outline. Turn this in with your other homework assignments.

Internet video link - Mind Mapping and Webbing: http://www.webinar.in.gov/p77h08ugyz1/

The Mind Mapping and Webbing techniques explained in this class are merely a method for organizing a long, complex report quickly (like the Superette robbery). These can also be used to easily provide a sequence for writing the report. The most difficult part of these techniques is convincing new report writers—who typically do not want to spend any more time behind the computer than is necessary—that these techniques are a worthwhile time saver. Although several of these techniques are not intuitive, they are easy to master.

Purpose – To give students practice in taking field notes and reorganizing these notes into a more usable product.

Homework Assignment #3: The evidence log below was written on the items confiscated from Gary Rennick’s vehicle (from the final exam Superette robbery video/case). This narrative portion of the Evidence Log may not be written in the best way. Rewrite the description of these evidence items. You may (and should) consult with others in determining how to word a better, more detailed, honest description.

Evidence Log

Item #1: One Smith and Wesson 38 gun  
Item #2: Four silver cased bullets  
Item #3: One expensive-looking gold Good Fellow watch  
Item #4: One plastic bag containing 30 grams of marijuana  
Item #5: One half bottle of Capt. Morgan Rum

Purpose – To give students practice in writing very concise, logical and detailed descriptions.

Homework Assignment #4:

Beginning your Progressive Homework Assignment:

You will view the final exam video during your first class session. Take copious field notes on this video! These notes will not only be helpful for writing your Progressive Homework Assignment, but they may be used during your Written Final Exam. The importance of good field notes cannot be stressed enough.

Between class hours 2 and 3, you should type a simple case report narrative (using a plain piece of paper, department form, or the ILEA standardized Arrest Report, Appendix B in the Student Manual) concerning the Superette robbery video you just watched. Turn this in with your homework assignments #1,#2 and #3. Save a copy of this original report in your computer. This is important! You will later be asked to again turn in this original version of your case report at a later date.

After each class session, you will be required to upgrade this “Progressive Homework” report with new information and by using the new skills you have learned in that class session. For instances, if the use of headings or a lead-in sentence was discussed in class, create a few headings or a lead-in sentence for your progressive report.

Purpose - To monitor how a student is progressing in his or her ability to write a sophisticated, complex report.

Session 209 et seq.
Today’ Subject: Brevity –

The Accurate Words techniques discussed previously and the Brevity procedures of this class work well together. These act like the proverbial hand-in-glove. The concepts in the Accurate Words lecture are somewhat abstract, but the Brevity lecture will now focus on some concrete ways to create an information “dense” report.

The concept of K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple Sir) is the fundamental principle presented in this class. These concepts are ones that the writer can use immediately and are not as difficult for new report writers to grasp as the Accurate Words concepts. The K.I.S.S. principle is the first step in a more nuts-and-bolts approach to report writing. Within this concept, the importance of Simple Sentences and Short Paragraphs are at the top of the list.

How it all works together: [http://www.webinar.in.gov/p5djh303gcd/](http://www.webinar.in.gov/p5djh303gcd/)

Along this line, students will hopefully see that generating a three page paragraph is perhaps not the best way to impress a judge. Those who must read many reports on a daily basis can testify to the challenge of plowing through a pile of three page paragraphs.

Along this line, those new officers who are gifted writers can certainly use complex sentences to their advantage, but most will benefit from the rule that when a question arises, erring on the side of too short and too simple is better than attempting to impress a judge with your “Philadelphia Lawyer” writing abilities.

Additional approaches for subdividing a report are also discussed during this class. Simple paragraphing divides a report as the subject matter changes slightly, but students are also advised that further subdividing a report by major subject areas can result in developing an even better report, especially for being able to find facts quickly. Using “headings” over these subdivisions, even better yet! These subjects will be discussed in even more detail in the Psychology lecture.

Although using these techniques do not actually make a report shorter (which sounds entirely counterproductive to the Brevity class), these techniques make reports much easier to write, and they add an appearance of sophistication with a minimum of effort. For the reader, it makes the report seem shorter—or at least more manageable.

Use of the Big E technique begins to get the student to identify those important issues for that particular case and to focus a report on those important issues while deemphasizing the not-so-important parts of an incident.

Avoiding duplication is also addressed. This technique illustrates that exhaustive detail in describing objects in the case report is not necessary so long as the needed detail is covered in another related report such as an evidence log or a witness statement. In short, writing extensive detail for an evidence item in both the case report and evidence log is duplicative and a waste of time. It is better to have a case report that is direct, concise and readable by a juror and save the mind-numbing detail for an evidence log or witness statement where the recitation of detail has a positive
psychological impact on a juror. A detailed Evidence Log shows a juror or judge that you are precise and detailed in your investigation and thought processes. A more streamlined case or arrest report shows that you understand the critical issues and have identified these in an efficient, understandable way.

For instances, a general vehicle description and a license plate number probably provide sufficient detail for a case report. Nevertheless, the evidence log (if the vehicle is impounded) should also list the year, model, VIN number, any damage to the vehicle, and any important or costly items found in the vehicle in addition to a general description. Most of this detail would bog down a case report and drive a juror into deep coma.

**Purpose:** To further demonstrate how to focus a report.

**Conclusions –**

The way in which a case is presented is as much of the process as reporting the facts. Efforts in writing a Dense Report and using psychological techniques to enhance the report (discussed in detail in Class Hour #6) are critical in constructing a really good document.
Subject for Hour 4: Preparing a Written Witness Statement –

Examples on Approaches to Constructing a Witness Statement: The reality is that an officer never really constructs a witness statement. The officer is actually helping the witness construct a statement. This must be kept in mind. A witness statement should be written in first person from the witness's perspective, not the officer’s perspective.

The officer is acting like a court transcriptionist who is recording the witness's actual recollections. This is not to say that the officer cannot focus the witness to what is important or use language that is not offensive, but the reporting of the fact—as given by the witness—must be accurate.

There are several approaches when preparing a witness statement. One approach is to allow witnesses to construct their own statements, in their own handwriting, without any assistance from the officer. This is a simple, fast way to construct witness statements but has many drawbacks.

One problem with this approach is that the witness may not know the critical issues to be addressed. Few witnesses know what the elements of any particular crime are. Likewise, a witness may write at a fifth grade level or have terrible handwriting which brings into question his or her mental ability. The person may be an excellent witness but just cannot place two words together in a logical manner.

Similarly, a witness who uses profanity or racial epithets diminishes his or her credibility. If witnesses are left together when using this approach, the officer will likely find that all the statements look nearly alike. This is because a dominant personality within the group says what happened and everyone else buys into the account whether this is accurate or not.

An officer can also transcribe the statement for the witness, as the witness gives the statement. This eliminates the profanity, handwriting and education problems but does little else.

A third approach is for the officer to interview the witness at the police department. After the officer is clear on what the witness has to say and that the witness knows what the critical issues are for this case, then the officer can begin transcribing the witness’s statement.

A fourth technique is to use a strict question and answer format (Q & A). The officer asks the witness a very specific question and the officer then records the witness’s response. Veteran officers will often combine these techniques within a single statement for maximum flexibility.

Each technique has its advantages and disadvantages. There is no absolutely correct way to construct a witness statement. The technique used should depend on the kind of case and the individuals involved. The officer must decide which approach will work the best for that particular case.
Indiana Law Enforcement Academy  
Basic Report Writing Course  
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT SHEET  
(Complete prior to Class Hour #5)

Complete and submit Homework Assignments #5 & #6 by the Monday evening following Class Hour #4.  
Read pages 19 through 20.

**Homework Assignment #5:**

Construct a Witness Statement from the final exam (Superette robbery) video shown at the end of Class Hour #1.  
Be prepared to discuss in class the approach you took for constructing this statement and why you chose that approach.  
More specifically, what format did you use?  Why?  What important information needed to be included in this witness statement?  Why?

Type your statement on your department Witness Statement form or on the standardized ILEA Witness Statement form (located in the “Basic” folder on the desktops of the computers in the computer lab).

**Specific Information for the Superette robbery Witness Statement** - Pick a witness listed below from among those in the Superette store at the time of the robbery.

**Witnesses:**

Chester Rawley (the store clerk)  
Justin Thyme  
Shirley True  
C. A. Criem  
Bea Shurr  
Abby Normal

Since no portion of the final exam Superette video shows what occurred in the store, students must make up what your witness said he or she saw during the robbery.  
You should also make up your witness’s address, DOB, etc.  
HOWEVER, the facts actually depicted in the video should not be changed, and you should report these accurately!  
The information that you obtain in this witness statement will also be used later in the course to help prepare your final arrest report, so BE COMPLETE!

**Purpose – To help students identify the critical issues that need reporting and to give students practice in reporting these facts in the most effective way.**

**Homework Assignment 6:**

Upgrade your Progressive Homework Assignment (report) by adding the things that you have learned from Class Hours 3 & 4.  
If you have not yet incorporated those things that were discussed in Class Hours 1 & 2, also modify your report by incorporating those techniques as well.  
Submit this upgraded Progressive Homework Assignment (#6) with homework assignments #5.

**Purpose – To train students to look for ways to revise and improve a report**

Session 209 et seq.
This Hour’s Subject: Completeness –

In the previous class, a comment was made that the accuracy and brevity concepts work together, hand-in-glove, to develop dense reports. In contrast, the term completeness sounds to be the exact opposite of the term brevity. This class does not, however, present a contradictory philosophy. The term brevity is not meant to infer inadequate and the term completeness is not meant to encourage wordiness. As used in this class, the term completeness is employed to help illustrate those critical areas of a report that absolutely must be addressed. These often involve the legal issues within a case.

Consequently, this class focuses on the differences between what should be included in an affidavit for arrest and an affidavit for a search as well as what should be in a Charging Information. These areas are highlighted because these areas are often inadequately reported.

Therefore, heavy emphasis is placed on addressing all the elements of the crime, not just the most obvious elements (for an arrest report or warrant). Likewise, emphasis is placed on “particularly” describing the place to be search and the item or items to be seized, and describing specifically why the officer thinks these items will still be there (for a PC affidavit for search). New officers often forget crucial elements within these reports that can result in losing cases.

This class also begins to reveal a few of the differences between writing to establishing Probable Cause for arrest compared to writing to establish Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt for conviction (as we transition into arrest reports). And finally, this class will again highlight how easy it is for new officers to focus on inconsequential detail (the Big E, small e concept).

As mentioned previously in the BIG Es lecture, it is important to avoid becoming overly detailed with irrelevant information. Dwelling on unimportant trivia makes the report mind-numbing and excessively long. The trick is to figure what the key elements are for this particular case and present those in a very complete, detailed manner while deemphasizing the aspects of the incident that do not need to be reported in great detail.

For example, it is easy for new officers to report tactical position and defensive maneuvers after a high threat call. Psychologically, these issues are on an officer’s mind after such an incident. But at the same time, the officer can totally forget to include the legal justifications for why the officer used an extreme level of force. Although tactical position is very important for officer safety, if no one was shot or injured, it is only marginally important for an arrest report. Conversely, if someone is shot, all tactical movements and every aspect of position and verbalization must be reported in detail.

Similarly, not every detail of a case is important in an arrest affidavit. PC affidavits need not be an exact copy of the case or arrest report, and in fact, making these affidavits exact copies has some real disadvantages.

Session 209 et seq.
Syllabus
ILEA Basic Report Writing Course
Hour #6
Psychological Aspects for Constructing Good Reports
(Read prior to Class Hour #6)

This Hour’s Subject: Making Reports Better Through Format, Form and Style –

This class shows some of the Tricks of the Trade that really dress up a report. These are worthwhile because they are so easy! Without changing the facts reported, using these techniques makes a report easier to read, more understandable and more attractive. These techniques incorporate methods for getting a reader to like your report.

Using Psychology –

Within the Psychological Aspects class, we will examine several alternatives to standard protocols. For example, in most report writing courses, full narratives and first person singular are the norms. However, people always like getting information in an easier format.

Bullet Style writing will be suggested as an alternative to accomplish this for certain limited situations. Likewise, using Heading allows someone to find information in a hurry. The same is true with using a Lead-in Sentence. People like easy. Easy is good!

Besides these techniques, this class will also examine when these techniques may not be the best approaches. For instance, using a more conventional “deductive” progression through a report (as explained in class) may have a psychological advantage—like using a third person approach—under certain circumstances even though this is not the shortest, easier approach.

Internet video links -  Lead-in Sentences:  http://www.webinar.in.gov/p1japh74j85/
List and Bullet Style Writing: http://www.webinar.in.gov/p8yx7ox1ovc/

Subject to be covered:

- A Show Them, don’t Tell Them approach
- The use of Headings
- Chronological and non-chronological progressions
- Use of a Lead-in Sentence (an extension of the “Inductive” progression approach)
- Subdividing a report by information type
- 1st Person vs. 3rd Person
- Bullet Style and List writing
- Avoiding duplication
- Use of a specialty paragraph, like a Venue Statement

Session 209 et seq.
Homework Assignment #7:

Write a Probable Cause Affidavit for a Search Warrant:

Read pages 23 & 24 and pages 38 - 48. Using the information in your personal field notes from the Superette robbery video, write a PC affidavit for a search warrant for Gary Rennick’s vehicle.

Remember that the minimum standards (areas of focus) for obtaining a search warrant are: “particularly” describe the item or items for which you are searching, i.e., the gun, ammo, any fruits of the crime; “particularly” describe where you want to search; and finally, why do you think this evidence is in that location now. More specifically, why do you believe the gun from the Superette robbery is still in Rennick’s car? Also include a lead-in sentence and a venue statement in your affidavit.

PC Affidavits compared to Arrest Reports:

In the final exam arrest report, you will be required to present enough facts from the Superette case to obtain a conviction rather than just enough to establish Probable Cause for arrest (meaning that you will need to prove all the elements of the crime to a Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt level). Consequently, you should begin thinking about what this will take compared to just making an arrest.

You will also be required to use one of the Exceptions to the Search Warrant Requirement to justify your search of Rennick’s car in your arrest report rather than using a search warrant. Therefore, you should begin thinking now about what you will need to report to justify your seizure of the gun and ammunition from within his car, i.e., what needs to be documented to justify a Carroll search, a Plain View search, or an Exigent Circumstance search in this case.

Purpose – To force students to identify and focus on the elements of a crime as well as what information is need for a search warrant.

Homework Assignment #8:

Internet link – Use of Headings:  http://www.webinar.in.gov/p389l6l7r71/

Formatting and Headings. Rearrange the Case Narrative below by subdividing the report into paragraphs and sections. Insert at least four (4) of the headings supplied below into the narrative and two that you create at appropriate locations. It is, in fact, possible to insert these headings without changing the chronological order of this report at all. However, there is nothing the matter with reporting an incident out of chronological order if using a modified chronological order or subdividing the report by subject matter makes for a better report.

Complete the below report by adding any additional information that you obtained from watching the video store robbery and shooting tape (shown at the end of Class Hour #6). You should also add facts [which you create] explaining how these men were captured, what scene processing occurred, victim’s condition, and any follow-up investigation that you or other officers completed such as taking witness statements. However, the facts that are portrayed in the video, report accurately! Several samples of how a report can be improved by subdividing it and using headings are presented in Appendix A of this manual. Read
these, please! These will be helpful. This exercise will be a practice run-up for your final exam. Make this a complete investigation. Incorporate all of the advanced techniques shown in this course (to this point) including the psychological techniques discussed in Class Hour #6. Assume the store owner, Mr. Dunn, later dies of his wounds. Your case is now a murder case. Pay particular attention to addressing all elements for the crime of murder, IC 35-42-1-1(2), to a Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt level.

HEADINGS TO BE USED

Officer Initial Observations and Actions
Follow-up
 Victim's Statement
 Witness's Statement
 Investigation at the Scene
 Evidence Collection and Processing
 Disposition

Original Case Narrative (perhaps not written in the best way):

I was dispatched to the Show ‘em and Tell ‘em Video Store, 3 Strikes Street, Nowheretogo, IN, 47666, at 1300 hours on April 1, 20xx, regarding a possible robbery. When I arrived, I met with Vicki Timm, 4 Ascare, Gunsight, IN, 47111. She told me that she and her son, Tiny Timm, had come to the video store to rent a travel video when two men, later identified as Willie Schoot and Rick O’Shea, no known addresses, had entered the store and robbed the store owner, Willie B. Dunn, 4 Heavens Way, Higherthan, IN, 43210. During the robbery, the robber later identified as O’Shea grabbed Vicki Timm and said he was going to take her to the back room. At that moment, Mr. Dunn then shouted “No” and lunged towards O’Shea. O’Shea then shot Mr. Dunn two times in the chest. Mrs. Timm then said that there was a bunch of yelling between the two men and the man later identified as Schoot grabbed the money from the cash register. Both men then ran from the store.

Purpose – To make officers plan how to organize a report and then write it using techniques and a format that will enhance the report.

Homework Assignment #9:

Upgrade your Progressive Homework Assignment (report) by adding the things that you have learned from Class Hours #5 & #6. If you have not incorporated those things that were discussed in Class Hours #1 through #4, also modify your report using those techniques as well. Submit this upgraded Progressive Homework Assignment (#9) with homework assignments #7 & #8. Some potential upgrade areas are:

- Replace empty words with more meaningful words
- Use short paragraphs
- Use short sentences
- Use a “Show Them” approach
- Really focus on the Critical Points
- Deemphasize the Irrelevant

- Use Headings
- Use a lead-in sentence
- Try some bullet style writing
- Use a venue statement
- Subdivide your report
- Be totally honest!

Purpose – To develop a habit to reviewing a report (proofreading) for the purpose of improvements.
Today’s Subject: Arrest Reports –

Writing an adequate arrest report seems the logical culmination for a police report writing course. This is, in fact, the report that is used for the final examinations in this course.

If officers generally perform at substandard levels when constructing reports, these deficiencies are most often revealed in an arrest report where defense attorneys, judges and jurors closely review an officer’s technique and conduct. In addition, the requirements placed upon an officer are typically the most demanding when someone is having his or her freedom restricted or property seized. Both of these difficult situations are typically documented in an arrest report. This, consequently, makes the proper construction of arrest reports very important. As will be seen, an arrest report must address many subjects in addition to the facts surrounding the arrest.

This class will present three of a four pronged approach to writing a good arrest report. This is an approach refined through years of writing reports but is certainly not the only way to approach how an arrest report can be constructed. The four parts to be addressed (remembering: content, content, content) are:

- Facts of the Actual Incident (the law violation)
- All Legal Requirements (requirements for getting evidence admitted, for example)
- Other Important Police Procedures (information not related directly to the law violation)
- CYA (presented in detail during Class Hour #8)

An Overview -
The first part, Facts of the Incident, is typically the easiest part. It is the core of the case. Officers proceed to the scene, talk to witnesses, view the evidence and write their reports. When critical omissions occur, these are usually in the second and third areas identified below.

The Legal Requirements are particularly important in arrest reports and often overlooked in the excitement of the incident.

The legal requirements for each type of case investigated will differ. For the Superette robbery case, the critical legal issues are:

- Proving all elements of Robbery to a Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt level
- Presenting at least one solid Stopping Justification (two or more are preferable)
- Identifying the justifications for the Use of Force (drawing and pointing the weapon)
- Explaining the Miranda Warning Procedures adequately
- Identifying the Search and Seizure justifications (for evidence on the suspect and in his vehicle)
The third area, **Other Important Police Procedures** is, to a degree, a housekeeping function. These areas deal with subjects that do not directly prove or disprove the suspect’s guilt. These are important “loose ends” that need to be wrapped up to have a complete report.

The location to where you tow the vehicle has nothing to do with the question of did Rennick rob the Superette Market, but this location and the vehicle status need to be documented. Here are some other important police procedures that need to be included in an arrest report.

**The Other Important Police Procedures** include things like:

- Was the car impounded? Who impounded? Where was the car towed to? Can it be released?
- Was the car inventoried? Was there a department inventory policy; was it followed?
- Who performed the inventory? Were items confiscated?
- Scene processing: Were photos taken, were there fingerprints lifted at the scene?
- Who handled the evidence? Who was the evidence turned over to? When?
- Was suspect arrested? What charges (initial)? Confined where? Who searched & transported?
- Did other officers complete supplemental reports? Who? Are reports attached?
- Were witness statements taken?

*** AND Any Hot Button—CYA—issues (discussed in Class Hour #8)

This final segment (the CYA section) was previously viewed as not that important in previous years and was just another Important Police Procedure. This area includes what is referred to in class as the Writing Your Way Out of a Career-ending Situations techniques.

Because of recent events, this segment is now presented as a stand-alone class. Like Other Important Police Procedures, this area really has little to do with whether the bad guy committed the crime. Nevertheless, that does not diminish its importance in today’s policing environment. In fact, this could be the most important class in the course for new officers.
Homework Assignment #10:

Prepare for your exams:

Multiple Choice Exam Questions –

Read pages 30 – 31 in this manual to prepare for multiple choice questions from the Report Writing course that will appear on subsequent core examinations and on the cumulative exam.

The Written Final Exam –

Prepare for the written final exam exercise, which requires students to compose the narrative for an arrest report covering the final exam video and assignments (the Superette robbery), by reviewing the material on page 32 of this manual.

Homework Assignment #11 – The Final Progressive Homework additions –

Upgrade your Progressive Homework Assignment (report) by adding the information presented in Class Hour #7 on Other Important Police Procedures. Ensure that you covered ALL the elements of the crime.

And then, double check that you have adequately addressed the other legal issues in the Superette case:

- Do you have a solid stopping justification—a statute violation, better yet, two or three statutory violations—or a solid Terry Stop justification?
- What is your justification, explained in your report, as to why you drew your weapon? Said another way, why was it necessary to use this amount of force?
- Did you adequately document your Miranda Waiver procedure?
- What is your legal justification for searching Rennick and seizing the ammunition in his pocket?
- What is your legal justification for searching Rennick’s car and seizing the gun and ammunition?
- Did you include facts that elevate the proof for each element of the robbery statute to a Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt level?

Complete one final “proofread” of your report for paragraph breaks, typos, factual errors and the like. You should now have a report that any prosecutor would be willing to accept to prosecute the Superette case.

Turn in your Progressive Report if you would like to apply for a waiver from the Written Final Exam!
Today’s Subject: Justifying Your Procedure –

Knowing what should go into a typical report to cover all the critical facts of that incident is important. Unfortunately, this may not be enough in today’s policing environment. In addition to information that has routinely been included in reports for prosecution purposes, officers today must also incorporate information that fully justifies nearly every police procedure taken by the officer. Failure to do so has resulted in a number of officers losing their jobs or damaging their career potentials in recent years.

This added area of documentation has proven to be critical when claims are made that officers are violating department SOPs, using unconstitutional procedures or employing excessive force. Properly documenting these areas can literally make the difference between excelling in a career and being forced from the profession years before retirement.

It has been said for many decades that there are really two trials that occur with any criminal arrest. The first is to see if the officer did everything correctly as it concerns the criminal case itself. Was the suspect Mirandized properly? Did the officer have a legal stopping justification? Were the evidence items seized correctly? It is only after all of these hurdles are cleared that the defendant is put on trial to determine if he committed the crime, or not.

Today, there is a third trial that officers must win. It is the trial of public opinion conducted in the media, on YouTube, in Facebook, and within the many political arenas of our country. This trial, unlike determining if the suspect was properly Mirandized, often has nothing to do with the criminal case whatsoever! It is simply an attack on the officer.

It was mentioned earlier in this course that Other Important Police Procedures are things that should be included in a police report. This newest area (Justifying Your Procedures) has in many ways now become the or at least a critical area. Consequently, an entire period is now devoted to addressing this issue.

This class will examine several areas of critical importance for heading off unjustified media attacks as well as politically motivated attacks. This class is not focused on criminal prosecution or even civil liability although these can also come into play. The focus here is public perception and avoiding unjustified disciplinary actions. This is simply presenting the officer’s actions in the most favorable light possible.

Beginning to Build Your Boilerplate Report –

Students will read a recent Indiana case that had an undesirable outcome in the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals (making this decision precedent in Indiana). Students will then be asked to think about ways—during the class—to construct a report that would present the facts of this case in such a way that the court case might have had a different result. At first glance, this may seem hopeless.
As grim as this first case seems initially, by the end of this class, students should be able to devise several methods for presenting these facts in a much better way that reflects more favorably on those officers involved.

Before analyzing this—more difficult—case in detail, the instructor will start the learning process by reviewing two less difficult cases. In the second case study, the instructor will outline techniques for wording a report that emphasizes that the officer used substantial restraint, is a concerned citizen and was perhaps even a hero as well as being an abider of the law.

In most cases, police officers are, in fact, very concerned about public perception. Unfortunately, the way many officers write their reports can project the impression that they are mindless, uncaring authoritarians who are exercising every degree of force and insensitivity they can. Countering this impression is the focus of this class.

Students will then be asked to use the techniques shown in the second case study to create a report for the third case study which will present the officer’s actions in a more favorable light. This class truly represents coming full circle to the original Accurate Words class. The selection of accurate, descriptive, proper words is absolutely critical here.

And finally, students will then be asked to refer back to the original (more challenging) Indiana case presented at the beginning of the class to make suggestions on how that report could have been written.

**The Process –**

The tricky thing about addressing Hot Button issues (the first step in this process) is that they can change so quickly. What is a critical issue in a community today may not be an issue that causes problems in a few months, and it, unfortunately, takes somewhat of a Sixth Sense to recognize what is going to become a Hot Button issue. Nonetheless, officers must not only identify these issues but must address them (the second step) promptly, i.e., in the INITIAL report, or the resulting controversy can spin out of control so fast that it is impossible to break the momentum. This was referred to in class as using the “Lone Ranger Strategy.” That is, an officer must “head ‘em off at the pass” to be successful.

Even issues that are not criminal law or federal civil rights violations can result in an officer being disciplined or terminated. The fact that a prosecutor sees nothing wrong with a procedure (viewing it from a criminal law perspective) does not mean that the chief or mayor will have the same perspective. And, it certainly does not mean the media or the public will have such a view.

Officers must employ a CYA approach: Can you anticipate; Can you analyze; Can you articulate?

Those accurate words concepts discussed in Class Hour #2 (the Accurate Words lecture) are used to link the second (can you analyze) step and the third (can you articulate) step. These are difficult formations, but choosing the best words and concept can literally mean saving your job or being forced out of the profession early. Officers need to be aware that when they are writing towards these issues, they are really writing for their wives, their children, their colleagues, their future, their departments, their honor and their profession. They are, in fact, Writing There Way Out of a Career-ending Situation.
Wrapping It All Up -

Students by this time have undoubtedly noticed that all of their homework assignments build upon a foundation and have been presented “in context” meaning that these assignments are not just oriented to writing techniques in an abstract, detached environment.

Getting the correct content into a report is as important as grammatical construction, understandable narrative and a good psychological approach. Adequately addressing the legal issues in a search or seizure, for example, is as important as writing a “dense” report or using a good lead-in sentence. The same can be said about a Miranda Waiver procedure or a stopping justification. What good is a smooth reading narrative in a police report if it fumbles on four out of four legal issues?

This is why the final exam for this course is also comprehensive, meaning that it incorporates writing techniques but also stresses content, content, content!

As part of this stress on content, techniques that are psychologically appealing to jurors such as the Show Them, don’t Tell Them approach or the Lead-in Sentence/Lead-in Paragraph (an extension of the Inductive Progression approach) have also been shown. Because of learning these skills, someone graduating this Academy should be able to construct an arrest report that is superior to that which an untrained university Ph.D. would write on the same incident. All that is needed by the new police officer is the desire to excel.

Along this line, helping others develop good report writing techniques improves the profession. Someone graduating this course, even though that person may be a rockie officer, now has enough background to present these techniques to coworkers at the department using the “Starting a Writing Improvement Program at Your Department” chapter within this manual, pages 38 to page 48. This chapter requires addressing only one concept per month.

A Profession –

The public typically accepts an occupation as a true profession not by the blue collar skills mastered in a school or academy but on the higher virtues that practitioners exhibit in the community and on the street. These include good decision making, high ethical standards, service to mankind, devotion to the occupation and solid communication skills—including good report writing skills. Mechanical applications and “autopilot” responses to difficult street situations demean a profession rather than enhance it.

As mentioned repeatedly in class, good report writers do not need to be experts in English grammar. They must, however, be willing to view, proofread and review again their reports for accuracy, style and approach. Only then can they become truth-speakers. Good report writing is the tool to accomplish all of these things.
Chapter 3

Preparing for Exams
Exam Study Guide for
Multiple Choice Questions

Officer should strive to create high quality reports because –
Documents event; It is impossible for remembering all the facts
Best route for promotion; Keeps officer out of court; Help prevent civil liability for officer

Important note-taking points –
Bound notebook; Use pen; No “individual” shorthand; some abbreviations OK
Create a “master” set of notes for any major crime (so different officers’ reports do not conflict at trial)

“Accuracy” means making changes if a word, phrase or sentence can be ambiguous or misinterpreted
Pronouns can be ambiguous; “Accuracy” means using the most meaningful words
Accuracy = Absolute Honesty!

Brevity means KISS
Brevity means avoiding “officious” language; avoiding “hollow” words; write “Dense” reports
Avoid police jargon, legalese, abbreviations, slang, acronyms, labels (unless explained)
Avoiding duplication if possible

The BIG Es: Deciding what the crucial points are for the report and then focus on these, in detail, while deemphasizing those aspects that are not so important; Again, create “information dense” reports.

Completeness (for new officers) means addressing all elements of a crime & particularly describing the place to be searched and the items to be seized as well as why they will be found there

Why making it Visual (Showing Them) is worthwhile: Images retained easier; More graphic & emotional; Harder to challenge

Why 1st Person: Easier to write; Usually easier to read; Usually the best method but not always
3rd Person can be very “Objective” sounding, detached and professional

Subdividing a report with Headings makes the report more organized and facts easier to find.
Heading can be used in a Chronological report or where like information is grouped together

Why use an “Inductive” progression when writing a report?
Readers are used to this approach (periodicals and newspapers) and catches reader’s attention, but Harder to write, and not as objective sounding as using a “Deductive” progression.

Chronological Progression: A logical progression, and easier to write, but
Strict chronological is often not as easy to read or understand.

The Focus of an Evidence Log is accuracy and detail
Usually the first step in the Chain of Custody
Used for IDing object to exclusion of other like objects
Written Statements
Is equivalent to witness testifying in court
Should be 1st person, witness’s perspective
Several acceptable formats; Officer must decide which approach/format is best for that particular case

P.C. Affidavit – Arrest (one good approach)
1. Lead-in sentence
2. Facts that prove ALL elements of the crime
3. Venue

P.C. Affidavit – Search (one good approach)
1. Lead-in Sentence
2. Items to be seized; particularly described
3. From where; particularly described
4. Why likely there at this time
5. Venue

Charging Information
Typically only the names and dates change for a particular crime (statute).
Narrative is a recitation of the statute wording

Incident/Case/Arrest Reports
Fact of Incident
Important Legal Issues
Elements of the crime (if an arrest occurred)
Stopping Justification
Use of Force justification
Miranda Warning procedure
Search & Seizure justifications (if no warrant) for BOTH the person and vehicle
Other Important Police Procedures
Inventories: who conducted, who seized, where evidence secured?
Impoundments: by whom, who towed, to where, releasable?
Suspect arrested: for what initial charge, by whom, who transported, to which jail?
Any supplemental officer reports or witness statements being prepared?
Justifications for officer’s actions, especially Hot Button issues

Webbing and Mind Mapping
For organizing and sequencing a report quickly

Some exam questions may come from the Student Quick Reference Outline, the Starting a Writing Improvement Program at Your Department or other areas of the Student Manual like the Taking Personal Field Notes section.

Remember, Focus and Approach are more important in this course than grammatical rules or flowery prose.
This means officers—after determining focus—need to think about: CONTENT, CONTENT, CONTENT!

And then, what is the best way (format and technique) to present this content?

Session 209 et seq.
Checklist and Study Guide for the Superette Armed Robbery
Written Final Exam

Checklist; Generally –

* Think about what the important issues are. What do you want to accomplish in writing this report?
* This should give you your focus for this report. Now you can plan content.
   (see Study Prep Guide for the final exam below)
* Diagram your report from your notes. Use a Webbing or Mind Mapping technique.
* Create a Lead-in sentence for your report and decide on subdivisions as well as other advanced techniques.
* Use your Webbing/Mind Mapping diagram and start typing under your first heading.
* Proofread your report on the computer. Make corrections, move subdivisions, etc.
* Save your report on the computer if you have not already done so.
* Now, it is time to slow down. Think about using better words, denser construction, eliminating duplication, ambiguous references and the like.
* Proofread your report one more time before submission. YOU ARE DONE!

Study (Prep) Guide –

Before coming to the final exam class, there are several areas that you should consider:

1. Have I found at least one good stopping justification in this case (more is better)?
2. Does the use of force come within a requirement where I need to justify its use in this case?
3. Have I thought about how I should document the Miranda Warning procedure?
4. Have I determined my legal justifications for searching the suspect and his vehicle?
5. Do I have all the facts that I need to prove all the elements of the crime of robbery to a Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt level?
6. Do I have the facts to document the incident and the Other Important Police Procedures?
7. Have I planned out a method, style and approach, for writing this report, e.g., using a lead-in sentence, a Show Them technique or subdivisions with headings? Have I planned my progression through the report using a Webbing or a Mind Mapping technique?
8. Review the report approaches shown in Appendix A in this manual.

If so, you are ready!
Deductive, a term used in this course which identifies a progression through a report in which the most important conclusions are presented at the end of the report after evaluating—in the report—the scene, all of the evidence and any witness statements or other information available to the officer.

Inductive, a term used in this course which identifies a progression through a report in which the most important facts or conclusions are presented first in the report or in the report subsections, with the next important set of facts presented second and so on. This technique often uses a lead-in sentence or section headings to summarize the report or sections of the report.

K.I.S.S., for purposes of this course, Keep It Simple Sir. A principle in which short paragraphs and sentences are typically preferred over more complex constructions. Techniques for making a report shorter by making it “dense” with information. This can include using techniques like bullet style writing or incorporating acronyms or labels if initially explained.

Mind Mapping, a technique for organizing and sequencing a report using a schematic diagram similar in design to an outline format or flow chart. This technique records important facts and subordinate facts in the case under headings. Each heading can have several subordinate subdivisions. Each division is numbered or placed in the schematic in the order in which it will be addressed in the report.

Officious, for purposes of this course, language which is needlessly stiff, formal or legalistic and does not convey much meaning. Unnecessary or overbearing language, e.g., The suspect did forthwith then and there perpetrate an assault upon my person, to wit: strike Officer R.E. Tort on his chin.

Pronoun, a word used in place of a noun, e.g., he, she, me, we, him, his, them, ours, yourself, anyone. These are addressed in this course because of their ability to mislead readers concerning who they refer to.

Webbing, a technique for organizing and sequencing a report using a schematic diagram similar in design to a spider web. This technique records important facts and subordinate facts in the case at specific locations on the web. Each location is then numbered to indicate the order in which those subjects will be addressed in the report.
STUDENT QUICK REFERENCE OUTLINE

I. Why Take Time To Write A Really Good Report?
   A. Usual justification – to record facts and refresh memory
   B. But also: Can keep you out of court. It is about how you project!
      1. Are you a sloppy investigator?
      2. Are you a muddled thinker?
      3. Are you lazy?
      4. Are you going to be easy to challenge in court?
   C. It can be a Quick Route to promotion or special assignment
   D. Shore up weak areas, emphasize strong areas, justify questionable police procedures (CYA).

II. Taking Field Notes (Remember, you can’t remember!)
   A. Take key words at the time; then flesh out shortly thereafter
   B. Satisfy the Who, What, Where, When, How and Why questions
   C. Ink is preferred
   D. Standard Abbreviations are acceptable
   E. Individual “Shorthand” symbols and script can become a problem
   F. Bound notebooks are best (electronic devices can present problems)
   G. Constructing a set of “Master Notes” (as defined in class) is important for any large crime scene so contradictions between officers do not surface at trial.
      Master Notes are developed AFTER conferring with other officers at the scene.

III. Steps in the Report Writing Process
   A. Note-taking
   B. Organize & reorganize material (Mind Mapping/ Webbing)
   C. Construct a Draft
   D. Proofread – then have another person proofread
   E. Tweak for mistakes, tone, format and style
   F. Produce Final Product

IV. Common Types of Reports prepared by new officers (as distinguished by content)
   A. Incident/Case Reports. These include:
      1. Accident Reports, as well as
      2. Domestic Abuse Reports and Information reports.
      3. These are the basic fact-documentation reports.
B. Evidence and Property Logs
1. Do not need full, grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs
2. But detail and description, very important

C. Written Statements
1. You are actually helping the witness create a statement.
2. You help focus them to the critical issues
3. Needs to be 1st Person from their perspective.

D. Legal Documents
1. Probable Cause Affidavit for Search & Arrest
2. A Charging Information
3. Very specific requirements!

E. Arrest Reports
1. Perhaps the most critical of all police reports.
2. Wrapping it all together in a solid, understandable, legal document.

V. Important Points, Common Mistakes & Points of Polish in Writing Reports

A. Accuracy
1. Precise words vs. Inaccurate words
2. “Hollow” words (place-takers)
3. Illogical/Ambiguous references, e.g., pronouns, phrases
4. Progression through a report, logical, many choices
5. Honesty, Absolute Honesty!

B. Brevity
1. K.I.S.S. (Short sentences, short paragraphs)
2. No Officious Language
3. Limit Duplications where Possible
4. Acronyms, Abbreviations, Slang, Jargon and Technical Language
5. Focus on important issues for that particular case
6. Deemphasize detail in areas not important for that particular case

C. Completeness – areas most often forgotten by new report writers
1. Including all elements of a crime
2. “Particularly” describing place to be searched and items to be seized

D. The Psychological Aspects of writing reports
1. First and Third Person (more or less objective sounding)
2. Subdividing a Report with Headings vs. Strict Chronological
3. Inductive vs. Deductive Progressions
4. Lead-in sentences and paragraphs
5. Show Them, don’t Tell Them techniques  
6. List and Bullet Style writing  
7. Mind Mapping and Webbing

VI. Putting together a complex arrest report  

A. What should go into a report  
   1. Facts of the incident  
   2. Important legal considerations  
      a. Addressing all elements of the crime  
      b. Stopping justification  
      c. Explanation for any use of force above routine cuffing  
      d. Miranda Warning Procedures  
      e. Any searches or seizures of item without a warrant, especially in light of *Arizona v. Gant*
   3. Other Important Police Procedures, e.g.,  
      a. Who impounded vehicle, who towed, & where to, releasable?  
      b. Who inventoried items, items turned over to, by whom, SOP?  
      c. Who transported arrestee, what was the initial charge, and transported to where?  
      d. Who collected evidence, took photos, turned over to whom?  
      e. Supplemental officer reports and witness statements

B. The CYA Class: Successfully report an arrest today also requires addressing:  
   1. Besides determining the facts of the case, did the officer do everything right procedurally?  
   2. Hot Button Issues; Lone Ranger Strategy; White Knight Writing  
   3. CYA: Can You Anticipate; Can You Analyze; Can You Articulate?  
   4. We come full circle back to the Accurate Words concepts. The choice of words here makes the difference between a successful career and being fired!

VII. Practice and Development  

A. Try new approaches from the above classes as your skills develop  
   1. Subdivide reports into subject matter categories & try using headings  
   2. Use a lead-in sentence or a lead-in paragraph  
   3. Make your description very “visual”  
   4. Try incorporating a “bullet” or list style format where appropriate in your reports  
   5. Try an inverted (inductive) progression through your report or some other non-chronological progression  
   6. Make a distinction between the BIG Es and the not so big Es  
   7. Try constructing a Webbing Diagram for complex reports
B. Remember – **Content** is the most important issue for new report writers

1. What information should go into this report?
2. But then, what is the best way to present this information?

VIII. Summary

A. Generating good reports is for more than just documenting the facts.

Other reasons include:

1. A path to promotion
2. Keeps officer out of court
3. Justifies questioned police procedures during incident (CYA)
4. Refreshes memory
5. Speaks well for the profession as a whole

B. Even though there are some general rules (such as writing in a chronological order and using 1st person) that should be used most of the time, do not be afraid to modify these approaches if to do so will make a better report.

C. Do not forget to:

1. Address all elements of a crime
2. Include important police procedures, e.g., who towed the vehicle, to where, etc., as well as all legal requirements such as the stopping justification, use of force, Miranda, and search justifications.
3. Immediately justify all Hot Button Issues that may be brought into question by superiors, media or the public (CYA)
4. Talk with other officers about all aspects of the incident. Make sure field notes substantially agree (Master notes) so that problems do not surface at trial when officers are actually in agreement.
5. When an officer begins typing his or her report, the officer is personally swearing to the report’s accuracy from that point on.
6. Focus on content. What should go into this report? What is the best way to present this information?

D. Good Report Writing is a process

Sell your department on using the “Starting a Writing Improvement Program” on page 38 of the Student Manual. Techniques in this program can be presented even by new officers.
Chapter 4

Starting a Writing Improvement Program at Your Department
Enhancing a Philosophy of Professionalism for Veteran Officers –

Report writing classes are typically thought properly given to new officers but rarely are viewed as worthwhile for veteran officers, at least by veteran officers. Nonetheless, report writing classes, in addition to developing a critical law enforcement skill, also develop officers as professionals.

Strange as it sounds, honesty and ethical behavior are enhanced when writing skills are enhanced. What we are doing in the report writing process is asking officers to tell on themselves. What officer wants to say something negative about himself? Report writing is a means for developing attributes that are not directly related to report writing but are nonetheless important in a profession.

For instance, service to the community is highlighted as the flip-side of the “Writing Your Way Out of a Career-ending Situations” class by using techniques through which officers draw attention to community-oriented reasons for handling situations as they did. For example, the officer might report that he had to take strong action to gain control of a situation because there were a number of young children present who could be easily hurt. An officer could report that he had to use a Taser because it was the method to gain control that was the least likely to cause permanent injury or damage to the suspect.

Likewise, documenting precisely what legal and moral justifications were used for a search, street detention or use-of-force could save a long debilitating court or media battle and demonstrate to the public that the officer had virtuous reasons for acting as he did.

At the other end of the spectrum, tactical skills like shooting, emergency vehicle operations and physical tactics are critically important for officer safety but are truly more akin to blue collar tasks than professional level competencies. Even with the police tactical skills, however, officers will want to portray themselves in a favorable light.

This means that they will report how they successfully negotiated a barricade situation or a neighborhood fight, or how they took a combative subject into custody, or gave aid to a victim. These are all tactical tasks that are not report writing skills per se, but they document—as “content” within a report—how the officer employed these advanced tactical skills well.

In the big picture, this is one of the few ways in which veteran officers can easily demonstrate competence in the tactical skills but also in high level professional competencies such as community relations, self-discipline, job knowledge, ethics and many others.

These attributes are developed because officers are required to document how they handle calls. It is like presenting a community-oriented policing class to an officer every time that officer sits down at the keyboard. Who wants to report how poorly he handled a call. Along that line, the absence of a fact or a set of facts in a report can speak loudly about honesty.

As report writing skills are enhanced—so that all can see, perhaps even feel, what it was like at that last bad call—we accomplish much more than simply reporting the facts. We continue to ask officers to tell on themselves. What will they say?
Start a Writing Improvement Program

Taking a Writing Improvement Program back to your department:
The Academy staff knows that developing high level report writing skills in a basic officer in just five class sessions is nearly impossible, even when an officer has substantial writing skills upon entering the Academy.

For this reason, the staff encourages officers to continue developing their skills at home through the program outlined below. This five step program incorporates several techniques outlined in the Basic Course which are easy to implement and will yield professional looking reports with a minimum of effort.

The following five steps work up from the simplest techniques through progressively more involved techniques. None of these steps, however, involve difficult concepts or long learning curves. Individual officers and departments can easily implement these techniques.

Five Steps to Better Reports:
We suggest implementing one of these steps each month. At the conclusion of the five month period, we think most departments will notice that their officers are producing substantially better reports.

1. Using a Lead-in Sentence. The use of a lead-in sentence is one of the easiest ways to get officers to think about what they are going to put into a report before they actually begin typing the report. This technique lends itself to constructing better incident, case, investigative and arrest reports as well as probable cause affidavits.

These sentences announce, up front, what the case is about so that supervisors, prosecutors and judges know what to expect from the report. The use of a lead-in sentence also forces the writer to think about what the focus of the report should be. A lead-in sentence can be used for a report generally, but it can also be used to introduce each section of a report. Some writers even encourage using a lead-in sentence for each paragraph.

Lead-in sentences often feel awkward to construct the first few times they are attempted but will flow naturally after a little practice. To construct a lead-in sentence for an arrest report, for example, distill what the desired result should be for the stop or investigation. Here are a few samples of lead-in sentences for an arrest report:

I (or Officer Smith) arrested Otto B. Recker for Driving Under the Influence after Recker drove a borrowed vehicle into a house and injured two people in the living room.

Tactical Officer C. Crimes arrested Willie Steal on a warrant that I obtained for the burglary of 1235 Second Street in which five guns were stolen.
Here are two lead-in sentences for a simple incident report:

I was dispatched to 234 Avenue B on a disturbance complaint. After talking with the neighbors, I found the complaint was unfounded. [or]

I was dispatched to 234 Avenue B on a disturbance complaint and found the complaint to be unfounded after talking with the neighbors.

2. **Subdividing a Report with Headings.** This is another very simple technique that requires very little training, extra work or thought and results in a much better looking report. The technique makes finding information in a report easier, and it is much more reader friendly. Unfortunately, many new (and a few veteran) police report writers tend to generate three page paragraphs which are difficult to read and make finding a particular fact very tedious.

Subdividing a report into sections forces police report writers to think about grouping like items of information. Although this will sometimes result in a report that is not written in a strict chronological format, the final result is generally much better.

Subdividing a report is even better when really good descriptive headings are used. The number of ways to subdivide a report and the number of potential headings to identify these subdivisions are nearly unlimited. Here are several common headings used by advanced report writers:

- Complaint
- Preliminary Information
- Officer Actions and Observations
- Incident Summary
- Victim/Complainant Statements
- Abstract of Witness Statements
- Witness List
- Suspect Statements
- Investigation at Scene
- Physical Evidence Summary
- Officers on Scene
- M.O. (Modus Operandi)
- Lab Results
- Follow Up and Supplemental Reports
- Statute Violations
- Disposition

These are just a few of the potential subdivisions. Officers (or a department) could opt to use only a couple of these for all reports but then expand the number depending on the complexity of the case and the length of the report. Answering a disturbance call, for example, typically requires much less effort than an armed robbery complaint with shots fired and a subsequent pursuit.
3. **Use of a Bullet Style Format.** With our progression through increasingly more sophisticated report techniques, a next logical step should probably be to examine ways to quickly pick out information from within a subdivision. Using bullet style writing is such a technique. Bullet or list style writing is worthwhile when several similar items need to be identified or included. Providing a few examples probably demonstrates this technique better than trying to explain it further.

Examples:

… and Smith was charged with:

- Disorderly Conduct, IC 35-45-1-3
- Resisting Law Enforcement, IC 35-44-3-3
- Public Intoxication, IC 7.1-5-1-3
- Possession of Marijuana, IC 35-48-4-11

… so I administered three sobriety tests. These were:

- The Finger to Nose test
- The Divided Attention test
- The Heel to Toe test

… The timeline was:

1. 3:45 a.m.  Company alarm activated
2. 3:53 a.m.  Officer Smith arrives on scene
3. 3:55 a.m.  Shots fired
4. 4:05 a.m.  EMS called

Bullet or list style writing makes information faster to find and easier to write.

4. **Using Mind Mapping or Webbing.** These and similar techniques have been used for years to quickly organize and sequence information. Although not particularly productive for very short reports, these techniques are very good for constructing longer reports. These techniques identify in a barebones fashion the important information and how the writer is going to progress through his or her report.

Typically, the toughest thing about using these techniques is getting officers to buy into their use. Officers who do not like writing reports view these techniques as requiring additional time that must be devoted to this unpleasant task. The truth is that a couple of minutes devoted to constructing a Webbing diagram makes typing the report much faster. It also organizes the report better and reduces the amount of information unintentionally omitted.
The information from a case is jotted down (similar to bullet style writing) in an outline form (for Mind Mapping) or in a spider web design (for Webbing) as demonstrated below:

**Mind Mapping**

- Robbery
  - Elements of
    - A person
    - Mental Element
  - Scene
  - Witness Statements
  - Pursuit

**Webbing**

- M.O.
- Element of Crime
- ARMED
- ROBBERY
- Physical Evidence
- Witness Statements

List all of the major areas that need to be covered for that report. Then add several subcategories and subcategories to those subcategories under each heading (Mind Mapping) or several “pods” for each major area (Webbing) until you have identified, by keywords, everything you should be report for that subcategory. For instance, under the pod reading Elements of Crime you can create an attached pod for each element, e.g., Mental Element; Takes Money, From Another, etc. Then under the Takes Money element, you can add keywords that reflect the facts of this case that satisfy that element. E.g., demanded money, in bag, bag found, contained $320, etc.

Next number each subcategory (or pod) for the order in which you want to cover that segment in your report. You are now ready to begin typing you first draft.

5. **Use the K.I.S.S. Principles.** This acronym simply means, **Keep It Simple Sir.** This concept focuses on brevity techniques for writing a report. Ironically, students are told generally to avoid the use of slang, clichés, police jargon, legalese, labels, acronyms and abbreviations in their reports unless these are so common that everybody knows their meanings, e.g., Mr. Sgt. Capt., etc. Nevertheless, basic student are shown (during their basic course “Brevity” lecture) that legal labels and acronyms can be used if explained or identified the first time they appear in a report. This is an effective technique for making a report shorter and faster to type.

An example would be if an officer conducted a Terry Stop search (pat-down) on a subject. Of course, a member of the general public, i.e., a juror, does not know what a Terry Stop search is. However, if a short reference is made in the narrative to “ … the Terry Stop which allows a pat down of the outer clothing for weapon under certain conditions …,” then the term Terry Stop can be used repeatedly throughout the report to again reference that particular search, a particular time in the case or discovered evidence. The same is true with terms like S.W.A.T., V.I.N. plates, ICE officers and the like.
Along the same line, other brevity techniques within the K.I.S.S. concepts encompass different approaches to making reports shorter or more understandable. Most basic course students would recognize the K.I.S.S. concept to mean that paragraphs and sentences should typically be short and that they should use the first person “I” and past tense with a Subject, Verb, and Object approach to writing. Beyond this, K.I.S.S. means finding ways to make a report brief without sacrificing critical information.

Officers in the basic class were encouraged to think along the lines of writing “dense” reports. Some techniques that can be practiced to accomplish this are described below:

**Avoiding Duplication.** With more involved cases, evidence is often confiscated and logged and witness statements prepared. If a detailed description is completed in the evidence log, why repeat this information in the case report? The inclusion of highly descriptive detail for all items of evidence makes a case report difficult for jurors to read and understand. So long as a witness statement, evidence log or other accompanying document is attached to the case report, there is generally no need to repeat this detailed information in each document. A simple reference to “the gun” or to “the money” is sufficient.

**Avoiding “Officious” Language.** We defined “Officious” language in class as that language which inserts “hollow” or placeholder words as well as terms that are often seen in “legal” documents that have very little meaning in modern English. Such words as *got, did, to wit, did then and there, forthwith, hereunto* and the like, consume considerable space, take time to type and add little to the report. The inclusion of these words often makes the report sound “official” and sometimes produces a nice singsong cadence to the report, but does little to provide much information.

**Using “Dense” Words and Sentences.** The next step beyond avoiding Officious words is actually thinking about cramming more meaningful words into the report. At this point in the writer’s development, writers should be considering their report construction in enough detail that word choices can naturally become a part of this process. For instance, the following modifications can be made to the below sentences:

**Original:** It was a dark in color vinyl bag.  
**Better:** It was a brown camera case.

**Original:** I did then and there effect an arrest after the perpetrator became assaultive with me.  
**Better:** I arrested Brown after he punched me.

**Original:** The documents were prepared by Officer A. Stoot, to wit: the search warrant affidavit and the arrest affidavit.  
**Better:** I prepared the arrest and search warrant affidavits.

**Focusing on the Critical Elements.** This is perhaps one of the most important but overlooked skills in report writing. We routinely see new report writer go on for pages about detail that is not important for the prosecution of the case while forgetting to include crucial information. These reports look to be well done simply because of their length, but often provide little information on critical issues. Asking officers to think about what the focus of a particular report
should be is the first step in getting them to include detailed information for important issues while deemphasizing the not-so-important information.

If there is an armed robbery which then leads to a substantial vehicle chase which then leads into a foot pursuit, officers will often spend pages detailing every motor vehicle violation of the chase as well as many small details in the foot pursuit and apprehension when most prosecutors are only interested in charging the offender with two or three of the most serious crimes, e.g., Robbery, Felony Battery, Resisting Law Enforcement. In those cases, detailing 30 motor vehicle misdemeanors and infractions is wasted effort.

6. **Hot Button Issues and the CYA Process.** *(Schedule. This segment of the program, Writing Your Way Out of a Career-ending Situation, can be presented during any of the five months identified above. It may be beneficial to present this during one of the earlier months. The most controversial problems facing departments are typically politically based rather than legally based. Learning how to handle these situations has become important in today’s society.)*

Knowing what should go into a typical report to cover all the critical facts of that incident is important. Unfortunately, this may not be enough in today’s policing environment. In addition to information that has routinely been included in reports for prosecution purposes, officers today must also incorporate information that fully justifies nearly every police procedure taken by the officer. Failure to do so has resulted in a number of officers losing their jobs or damaging their career potentials in recent years.

Today, there is a also a trial of public opinion conducted in the media, on YouTube, in FaceBook, and within the many political arenas of our country concerning police conduct. This trial, unlike determining if the suspect was properly Mirandized, often has nothing to do with the criminal case whatsoever! It is simply an attack on the officer.

This class called the CYA class will examine several areas of critical importance for heading off unjustified media attacks as well as politically motivated attacks. This class is not focused on criminal prosecution or even civil liability although these can also come into play. The focus here is public perception and avoiding unjustified disciplinary actions. This is simply presenting the officer’s actions in the most favorable light possible.

**Procedure.** Choose a local case that went badly for the officer(s). If you cannot find a local case, you may call ILEA. Instructors there have several cases that you can use. Outline your responses to this case before you present this class to your officers. The suggested procedure for officers to address these issues in their case or arrest reports is:

a. Identify any potential **Hot Button** issue which may make you (the officer) or the department look bad.

b. Address this or these issue(s) immediately in your initial case or arrest report. This is what we call the **Lone Ranger** approach (heading them off at the pass). This is important because once momentum starts building in the other direction, it is very difficult to stop it. Any subsequent attempt to explain an officer’s behavior is typically viewed as a cover-up.
c. View the questionable behavior from the perspective of the most ruthless defense attorney one can imagine. This is **taking off your white hat** for a while, a very difficult thing for police officers to do, but this will enable you to identify all derogatory things that a defense attorney or the media might say about the behavior.

d. Now, **put your white hat back on** and address every one of those behaviors. Begin writing your explanation of your behavior in such a way that it looks noble from an outsider’s view (not from a legalistic officer view). For example, you Tased the child, not because he was a threat to you, but because he was a threat to the other children standing nearby. The Taser was the method that would most quickly bring the situation under control with the least likelihood of permanent injury to the child. Use a reason for your actions, not that it protected or benefitted you, but that it protected someone else, even including the suspect. This is the **White Knight** approach.

e. Now proofread your explanation and replace “empty words” with those that are more descriptive and have a little emotion infused in them. For instance, if you are attempting to show that a suspect is mentally unstable, instead of saying that he was standing in the front yard in his boxer shorts; say that he was half naked, dressed only in his underwear briefs. This paints a much more vivid picture. If you take an AR-15 to a scene and do not mention this in your report, the media may refer to this as a “machinegun.” Doesn’t that sound much worse than taking a department-issued semi-automatic patrol rifle? If it does, perhaps you should supply the terminology. Did you slap a juvenile who was attacking you or did you use an open-hand defensive tactics maneuver taught at the ILEA?

**Conclusions.** The tricky thing about addressing Hot Button issues is that they can change so quickly. What is a critical issue in a community today may not be an issue that causes problems in a few months, and it, unfortunately, takes somewhat of a Sixth Sense to recognize what is going to become a Hot Button issue. Nonetheless, officers must not only identify these issues but must address them promptly, i.e., in the INITIAL report, or the resulting controversy can spin out of control so fast that it is impossible to break the momentum.

Even issues that are not criminal law or federal civil rights violations can result in an officer being disciplined or terminated. The fact that a prosecutor sees nothing wrong with a procedure (viewing it from a criminal law perspective) does not mean that the chief or mayor will have the same perspective. And, it certainly does not mean the media or the public will have such a view.

Officers must employ a CYA approach: Can you Anticipate; Can you Analyze; Can you Articulate?

The information presented during this class may well be some of the most valuable in an officer’s career. Officers need to be aware that when they are writing towards these issues, they are really writing for their wives, their children, their colleagues, their future, their honor and their profession. They are, in fact, Writing There Way Out of a Career-ending Situation.
Wrapping it all up:

Any basic course graduate has enough experience to present the material in this Writing Improvement Program. One does not have to be an experienced report writing instructor.

Show your CEO this five month, five-step program, and see if he or she would be willing to implement it at your department. The staff at ILEA believes that if implemented, this program will produce a dramatic improvement in your department’s reports.

Thank you for taking the time to further elevate the professional level of Indiana’s law enforcement community – The ILEA staff.

Officers typically find that once they master creating quality reports, they will experience that -

“The pen is mightier than the sword” – Edward Bulwer-Lytton
Report Writing Critical Case Checklist
Do you have an important misdemeanor or felony case?
Try using this checklist for writing your report.

* Think about what the important issues are. What do you want to accomplish?
* This should give you your focus for this report. Now you can plan content.
* Diagram your report from your notes. Use a Webbing or Mind Mapping technique.
* Create a Lead-in sentence for your report.
* Decide what your subdivisions and heading will be for your report.
* Use your Webbing/Mind Mapping diagram and start typing information under your first heading.
* Repeat for all headings.
* Proofread your report on the computer. Make corrections, move subdivisions, etc.
* Print your report. Now it is time to slow down. Think about using better (denser) words, eliminating duplication, ambiguous references and the like.
* Give your report to someone else to proofread

YOU ARE DONE! (at least temporarily)
Appendix A

Sample Arrest Reports
ILEA REPORT WRITING SAMPLES
USING DIFFERENT APPROACHES, STYLES AND TECHNIQUES

An Armed Robbery and Murder Report

EXAMPLE #1

This example uses a strict chronological approach with few other attributes.

While on routine patrol, I was dispatched to the Show ‘em or Tell ‘em Video Store, 3 Strikes Street, Nowheretogo, IN, 47666, at 2300 hours on April 1, 20xx, regarding a possible robbery. When I arrived, I met with Vicki Timm, 4 Ascare, Gunsight, IN, 47111. She told me that she and her son, Tiny Timm, had come to the video store to rent a travel video when two men entered the store and robbed the store owner, Willie B. (Bob) Dunn, 4 Heavens Way, Higherthan, IN, 43210. Mrs. Timm said that one of these men, she described as a white male, in his late 20s to early 30s, 5-9, 160 lbs, with a goatee said he was going to take her to the back room for a few minutes. At that moment, Mr. Dunn then shouted “No” and lunged towards the man with the goatee. The man with the goatee then shot Mr. Dunn two Thymes in the head according to Mrs. Timm. Mrs. Timm then said that there was a bunch of yelling between the two men and the second man described by Timm as white male, in his late 20s to early 30s, 5-9, 160 lbs, wearing a uniform baseball shirt grabbed the money from the cash register. Both men then ran from the store. Timm said that she then called the police using the store telephone. Upon arrival, I notified dispatch to send an ambulance for the store clerk. Dispatch related that an ambulance was already in route. Just as I was arriving, Officer Leif Savir also arrived on scene who is an EMT. He immediately began treatment on the store clerk. It was apparent to this officer that Mrs. Timm was very upset, and it took some time before I could obtain any useful information to relate to dispatch for broadcast to other units. During this time, I was able to determine from another witness, Justin Thyme, 234 Walkway Street, Thistown, IN 46350, who was walking past the store at the time that both men got into a late model Oldsmobile with a broken right taillight and a Illinois license plate. Upon finally obtaining this information, an all points bulletin was made which resulted, within two minutes, of a traffic stop on a suspect vehicle approximately five blocks from the scene by officers Ima Kopp, badge #777, and Willie Chase, badge #013. They reported to me that the passenger who was wearing a uniform baseball shirt fled from the vehicle but was caught by Officer Chase after a very short foot pursuit. The vehicle and suspect descriptions all matched what I had given dispatch. Officer Kopp radioed me that he had done a Carroll search of the vehicle and found a small bag containing assorted U.S. currency of different denominations and two handguns, one Smith & Wesson semi-automatic pistol, serial number 123456789, and one Smith and Wesson revolver, serial number 987654321. Officer confiscated both of these guns as evidence as well as the bag of money and, after searching the rest of the vehicle with negative results called Merritt’s Towing to impound the vehicle. The vehicle will be taken to the 3rd Street police impoundment lot. The Carroll County Ambulance service arrived on scene and paramedics, Smith and Jones, stated that Mr. Dunn was deceased and they were calling the coroner. I then secured the scene and called for the detectives. Detective Sergeant Betty Getsems and Lt. Ivan A. Klue arrived on scene a short time later. They said that they would also get with Officers Chase and Kopp to secure the evidence. I introduced the detectives to Mrs. Timm and they began to interview her. They also took command of the scene. I then cleared the scene at 2350 hours and proceeded to the J. Edgar Security Complex and jail. There, I discovered that the man with the goatee was Bobbie “Gunner” Down, no known address, and the man wearing the baseball shirt was Rob A. Stooje, 2 Singsing, Penalton, IN. Both men were charged with Robbery and Murder.

The above sample does not paragraph information, or use short sentences, subdivide information or present facts in any logical fashion other than a strict chronological order, and it does not attempt any technique which would make it more concise.

Now, compare the following approach which begins to integrate some additional techniques. Do these make a significant improvement of this report? You be the judge!
EXAMPLE #2

This example takes the same report but simply divides it into paragraphs. Notice that the first few words of each paragraph introduces a new subject area.

While on routine patrol, I was dispatched to the Show ‘em or Tell ‘em Video Store, 3 Strikes Street, Nowheretogo, IN, 47666, at 2300 hours on April 1, 20xx, regarding a possible robbery.

When I arrived, I met with Vicki Timm, 4 Ascare, Gunsight, IN, 47111. She told me that she and her son, Tiny Timm, had come to the video store to rent a travel video when two men entered the store and robbed the store owner, Willie B. (Bob) Dunn, 4 Heavens Way, Higherrhan, IN, 43210. Mrs. Timm said that one of these men, she described as a white male, in his late 20s to early 30s, 5-9, 160 lbs, with a goatee said he was going to take her to the back room for a few minutes. At that moment, Mr. Dunn then shouted “No” and lunged towards the man with the goatee. The man with the goatee then shot Mr. Dunn two Thymes in the head according to Mrs. Timm.

Mrs. Timm then said that there was a bunch of yelling between the two men and the second man described by Timm as white male, in his late 20s to early 30s, 5-9, 160 lbs, wearing a uniform baseball shirt grabbed the money from the cash register. Both men then ran from the store. Timm said that she then called the police using the store telephone.

Upon arrival, I notified dispatch to send an ambulance for the store clerk. Dispatch related that an ambulance was already in route. Just as I was arriving, Officer Leif Savir also arrived on scene who is an EMT. He immediately began treatment on the store clerk. It was apparent to this officer that Mrs. Timm was very upset, and it took some time before I could obtain any useful information to relate to dispatch for broadcast to other units. During this time, I was able to determine from another witness, Justin Thyme, 234 Walkway Street, Thistown, IN 46350, who was walking past the store at the time that both men got into a late model Oldsmobile with a broken right taillight and an Illinois license plate.

Upon finally obtaining this information, an all points bulletin was . . .

EXAMPLE #3

Now let’s place a few Headings in the report and pull out the redundant information. If full names, addresses, serial numbers on guns, etc. are reported elsewhere in the report (such as in the “block” section of the report or on an attached Evidence Log), keep these out of the narrative. We can also take a few things out of chronological order to improve the report. For instance, wouldn’t it be better to know both suspects’ names at the beginning of the report?

Complaint:
While on routine patrol, I was dispatched to the Show ‘em or Tell ‘em Video Store at 2300 hours regarding a possible robbery.

Victim Account:
When I arrived, I met with Vicki Timm. She told me that she and her son, Tiny Timm, had come to the video store to rent a travel video when two men, later identified as Rob A. Stooge and Bobbie Downs, entered the store and robbed the store owner, Willie B. (Bob) Dunn. Mrs. Timm said that one of these men, she described as a white male, in his late 20s to early 30s, 5-9, 160 lbs, with a goatee said he was going to take her to the back room for a few minutes. At that moment, Mr. Dunn then shouted “No” and lunged towards the man with the goatee. The man with the goatee then shot Mr. Dunn two times in the head . . . Both men then ran from the store. Timm said that she then called the police using the store telephone.

Officer Actions:
Upon arrival, I notified dispatch to send an ambulance . . .
EXAMPLE #4

Next, let's rearrange the information in the report. We can place like information under common subdivisions, such as evidence collected and officers involved. We can list some of these in a bullet style format and place some critical information at the beginning of the report (a technique we identified in class as employing an “inductive” progression). A good example of this is the use of a lead-in sentence that summarizes the entire incident at the very beginning of the report.

Complaint:
I was dispatched to the Show 'em or Tell 'em Video Store at 2300 hours regarding a robbery which resulted in Bobbie Downs and Rob A. Stooge being arrested for robbery and murder after the shooting death of the store clerk, Willie B. Dunn.

Victim Account:
When I arrived, I met with Vicki Timm, who said . . .

* *

Evidence Collected:
One Smith & Wesson semiautomatic pistol
One Smith & Wesson revolver
One 76 Oldsmobile Delta 88
U.S. Currency in the following denominations:
  3 – twenty dollar bills
  2 – Ten dollar bills
  4 – Five dollar bills

Officers Involved:
Lief Savor Provided initial first aid to victim
Ima Kopp Performed traffic stop and arrest of Stooge
Willie Chase Foot pursuit and arrest of Down
Betty Getsems Detective on scene
Ivan A. Klue Lead Detective

Follow-up Investigation:
I later talked with …

Hopefully, officers can see how incorporating these additional techniques improves this report and makes it easier to read and easier to find the facts in the case for prosecutors, judges and jurors. Students are encouraged to integrate these additional techniques into their reports as they develop their skill levels. There are, of course, many other advanced approaches, but mastering even these few techniques will greatly improve an officer’s written reports.
Appendix B

Course Report Forms
ILEA Report Writing Forms –

Students are invited to use their department forms for all homework assignments so that they can become comfortable in completing these forms. For convenience or if a department does not have an individual form for the required homework assignment, students can used the ILEA supplied report forms. These forms include:

- An Evidence Log
- A Formal Witness Statement Form
- A Probable Cause Affidavit
- An Arrest Report form and supplement

These forms can be found on your tablet, in the Student Manual (Appendix B), on the ILEA 2506 page, and on all of the computers in the computer lab.

In the computer lab, after logging in, click on the “Basic” folder on the desktop. Then click on the “All Report Writing Forms” folder.

To access material on the 2506 page, establish an Internet connection and then enter the address:

www.in.gov/ilea/2506.htm
Being duly sworn, the affiant, _________________________, says that:

I swear or affirm under the penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true.

__________________________________________
Signature of Affiant
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<td>Date Evidence Collected</td>
<td>Location Where Collected</td>
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<td>Other Officer at Scene</td>
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<td>Item(s) #</td>
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<td>Item(s) #</td>
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# Evidence Log

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Signature of Collecting Officer

Page ____ of ____
## ILEA Police Department
### Voluntary Witness Statement

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I swear or affirm that the statement I am giving (hereunder) is truthful and accurate:

---

Signature of Officer Taking Statement  
Signature of Person Making Statement
## ILEA Police Department
### Arrest Report

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Summary: 

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<td>Address</td>
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<td>Vehicle Involved (if any)</td>
<td>Vehicle Status</td>
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**Investigation and Arrest Details:**

---

Officer Signature

______________________________

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Table of Contents

Page 60 of 60