

Observation Skills

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Security Guards are often described as the "eyes and ears" of their clients, hired to notice and report anything unusual at the site they are guarding. Developing strong powers of observation is crucial, and patrols provide an excellent opportunity to practice. Enhancing observation and memory skills will improve all aspects of your job, including handling situations, conducting patrols, and completing written reports.

What are powers of observation?

Observation is a process that includes:

1. **Noticing:** Becoming aware of something through any of your five senses.
2. **Interpreting:** Organizing the information into something meaningful.
3. **Recalling:** Remembering the information and accessing it when needed.

1. Noticing

Have you ever stared at a TV screen without really seeing it, or driven from point A to point B without remembering the journey? This occurs when your brain is on "automatic pilot," likely thinking about something else. As a Security Guard, you must be actively aware of everything around you, a skill developed through experience and practice.

2. Interpreting

The second part of observation is interpreting. Noticing things using your senses is not enough; you must think about the smells, sights, sounds, and touches you experience on patrol. Analyze these to identify potential dangers, accidents, or crimes. Trust your instincts and be suspicious of anything unusual. The saying "better safe than sorry" is especially relevant for Security Guards:

- Be cautious not to jump to conclusions about people. Describe what you smell, hear, see, or feel without assuming you know the cause. For example, someone may appear drunk but could have a condition such as cerebral palsy or diabetes.

3. Recalling

The third part of observation is recalling. You will often need to remember incidents, faces, names, dates, and other details for your supervisors, clients, police, and courts. Record observations as soon as possible, as memories fade quickly, especially when your mind is occupied with other tasks. Improve your memory by practicing these skills (Remember CAR):

- **Concentration:** Focus on one thing while ignoring distractions. Practice describing a person in a crowd while tuning out others. Focus on a different sense each time you patrol.
- **Association:** Relate new information to something already in your memory. For instance, associate a new name with someone you already know with the same name.
- **Repetition:** Repeat information to increase the likelihood of remembering it. Practice this with things like license plate numbers.

A Final Caution:

On patrol, boredom can be your biggest enemy, especially if you have been working at the same site for a long time. Boredom can cause you to become less attentive. Combat boredom by varying your patrol routine. If possible, reverse the order of your patrols (e.g., top down instead of bottom up, inside then outside, or alternating odd and even floors). Pay close attention to details. Our brains tend to fit new information into what they already know, which can distort the information. Things may not always be what they seem.

Distinctive Features and Recognition

The ability to recognize a person or object depends on several factors, including the distance, size, and illumination of the object.

1. Distance and Familiarity

- **Recognizing Familiar People:** Friends or relatives can be recognized in daylight up to 100 yards away.
- **Recognizing Unfamiliar People:** Individuals not known to the observer can only be recognized in daylight up to 30 yards away.
- **Nighttime Recognition:** Under a full moon, a person can rarely be recognized beyond 10-12 yards.

2. Size of the Object

- **Large Objects:** Larger objects can be recognized from a greater distance because their features are more noticeable. The bigger the object, the farther the observer can be while still recognizing it.

3. Illumination of the Object

- **Amount of Light:** The amount of light reflecting off an object to the observer's eye determines how easily it can be recognized. Sunlight makes objects more recognizable than street lights.
- **Direction of Light:** Recognition is easier if the light is shining on the object and away from the observer, rather than toward the observer.

- **Color of Light:** The color of the illumination can alter the perceived color of the object, affecting recognition.

Problems Related to Sight in Observation

Night Vision: At night, your peripheral retina is more effective in receiving light. If you look directly at an object, it may fade because the image hits a "dead spot" in your eye. To counter this, look slightly above, below, or to one side of the object to avoid the dead spot.

Position of the Observer: The observer's position can alter perception. For example, a seated person often overestimates the height of a standing person nearby. Keep this in mind when recording descriptions. Conversely, it is difficult to estimate the height of a seated person from a standing position.

Hearing

Hearing is crucial in identifying persons, places, events, and things, especially at night when visibility is limited. Familiarize yourself with normal workplace sounds, such as:

1. **Activity Noises:** Animal calls, footsteps, glass breaking.
2. **Voices:** Volume, pitch, accents, intonation.
3. **Motors:** Drills, saws, foreign and domestic vehicles.
4. **Firearms:** Pistols, rifles, shotguns, automobile backfires.

Smell

A professional Security Guard must distinguish potentially dangerous odors to assist emergency personnel and minimize loss of life and property. Recognize and differentiate the following substances:

- Gasoline
- Natural gas
- Health-endangering gas fumes, such as chlorine gas
- Smoke from wood, electric sources, or rubber

Note: Prolonged exposure to certain smells, like Ether, may temporarily dull your sense of smell.

Taste

Taste is closely related to smell, allowing us to experience sweet, sour, salty, and bitter flavors. However, never rely on taste during patrols, as other senses provide more information, and ingesting unknown substances can be dangerous.

Touch

The sense of touch can provide vital information:

- **Heat:** Feel walls or glass for heat from an unseen fire.
- **Vibrations:** Detect vibrations from sound, movement, or tools during a burglary.
- **Health Checks:** Check the pulse or heartbeat of an unconscious victim.
- **Intrusion Detection:** Examine doors and windows in the dark for signs of forced entry. However, use a flashlight to avoid destroying evidence or injuring yourself.
- **Vehicle Checks:** Feel tires, engines, or mufflers for warmth to determine if a car has been recently used.
- **Material Identification:** Identify types of cloth or paper by touch.

Memory

Memory is essential for recalling information to fulfill security responsibilities effectively. Like muscles, memory improves with use. Incorporate memory tests into daily life to enhance this skill. Here are some exercises:

- **Pedestrian Observation:** During patrols or while shopping, observe a pedestrian and mentally record their appearance. Later, double back and compare your mental record with the person's appearance. Gradually reduce the time you take to study the person and increase the time before re-examining them.
- **Display Cases:** Use the same technique on display cases with various objects.
- **Photographs:** Study photographs, set them aside, write lists of your observations, and then compare. This can also be done with objects in a box.

By practicing these exercises, you can significantly improve your memory and observation skills, enhancing your effectiveness as a Security Guard.

How to Improve Your Senses

Sight

- **Vision Testing:** Ensure your vision is regularly tested and is in optimal medical condition. Wear glasses or contacts if needed.
- **Focused Observation:** Make a conscious effort to focus on what you see. Be actively aware of your surroundings and concentrate on details.

Hearing

- **Hearing Condition:** Ensure your hearing is in top medical condition.

- **Sound Recognition:** Learn to distinguish various sounds associated with crime and those normal to your job site. Only state that you heard a particular sound if you are 100% sure.

Smell

- **Awareness of Limitations:** Be aware of when your sense of smell is limited, such as during a cold or sinus condition, and take precautions.
- **Dangerous Smells:** Learn to recognize and distinguish dangerous smells at your site.

Touch

- **Unobstructed Sense:** Do not cover your sense of touch with other materials.
- **Usage:** Know when and how to use your sense of touch, such as feeling for warmth on doors and walls when there is a potential fire.
- **Material Recognition:** Learn to distinguish different materials by touch.

Practical Applications and Solutions

The skills discussed will enhance all aspects of your work. Your performance, along with your peers and supervisors' perceptions of your effectiveness, will improve as you develop these skills. Always be aware of the senses you are using and utilize them to their fullest capabilities. Consider which sense will provide the most and best information and remember that information.

Dim Light or Darkness

Problem	Possible Solution
Objects blend in with the background.	Shift your attention slightly to the side of the object; it will be easier to see than looking directly at it. Crouch down to silhouette the object against the sky.
Slow moving objects and objects close to the ground are hard to see, such as someone crouched near a building.	Look above and below the object to create a contrast.
Blinded when moving from a light area to a dark area.	Shut your eyes for a few seconds to allow them to adjust. If moving from a dark area into a lighted area and back into a dark area, shut one eye while in the lighted area to see better in the next dark area.

Color Distortion

Problem	Possible Solution
Colors do not seem the same	When interviewing witnesses, consider that they may be

Problem	Possible Solution
to everyone.	colorblind.
Colors may not look the same under different types of light.	Understand how different types of lighting inside and outside your building affect colors. For example, consider lighting when describing a car.

By consistently practicing these techniques and remaining vigilant about using your senses effectively, you will enhance your observation skills and overall job performance.

Things to Watch for When Observing People

Face

Forehead:

- Shape: High, low, wide, narrow

Skin:

- Texture: Smooth, deeply wrinkled, lightly wrinkled

Markings:

- Moles, scars

Ears:

- Size: Large, small
- Position: Flat against head, sticking out

Cheeks:

- Shape: Sunken, filled out
- Wrinkles: Shape, deep or light

Cheekbones:

- Height: High, low
- Width: Wide, narrow

Facial Hair:

- Mustache, beard, sideburns

Hair:

- Type: Straight, loose curls, tight curls, waves
- Style: Long, short, parted, neatly combed

Mouth:

- Corners: Turned up, turned down, level
- Upper Lip: Thin, medium, full
- Lower Lip: Thin, medium, full

Eyebrows:

- Shape: Arched, straight, down slant, up slant, irregular

Eyes:

- Shape: Round, oval, up slant, down slant

Eyelids:

- Position: Wide open, partly closed

Nose:

- Shape: Flat, wide, long, etc.
- Nostrils: Narrow, flared, wide

Neck:

- Front: Double chin, large Adam's apple, etc.
- Sides: Hanging jowls

Chin:

- Shape: Round, oval, pointed, square
- Other features: Small, double, dimpled, cleft

Full Body**Jewelry:**

- Watch, ring, bracelet, nose ring, earrings, tie clip

Sex:

- Male or female

Age:

- Estimate

Height:

- Compared to your own height

Weight:

- Estimate

Build:

- Overweight, slim, muscular

Other:

- Unusual makeup, clothing too large or too small, odd colors, patches, etc.

Glasses:

- Size, shape, color

Shirt:

- Style, color, sleeves, collar

Extras:

- Belt, chains, scarf

Skin:

- Color, pimples, pockmarks, acne, clean-shaven, tattoos

Pants:

- Color, style (skinny jeans, shorts), cuffs

Socks:

- Color, pattern, length

Shoes:

- Color, style (laces, buckles, slip-ons, sandals)

Other Clothing:

- Hat, coat, sweater, tie, dress, boots, etc.

General Appearance:

- Neat, sloppy, clean, dirty, etc.

Things to Watch for When Observing Objects, Property & Vehicles**Describing Objects and Property:**

Vehicle Description: When describing vehicles, observe every detail to differentiate between similar makes and models.

- Color, Year, Make, & Model
- License plate number
- Location of the vehicle
- Identifying damage or markings
- Motor vehicle registration information
- Headlight panels
- Decals and racing stripes
- Mufflers
- Stereo systems
- Security alarms
- Window tinting
- Any items left on the seat or dashboard

By paying close attention to these details, you can provide comprehensive and accurate descriptions, which are crucial in security work.