

Module 4: Report Writing

Note Taking and Reports

Security Guards are tasked with preparing written reports detailing occurrences, duties performed, and thorough descriptions of their activities and observations. These reports serve various audiences and must be composed in a clear, standardized manner to ensure the accurate and unbiased conveyance of information.

Taking Notes

Effective note-taking aims to enable the writer to record concise, accurate accounts of daily events in their notebooks. This lesson emphasizes the significance of notebooks for security guards, illustrating how they can become essential tools in their duties.

For a security guard, a notebook is as indispensable as a wrench for a plumber or a hammer for a carpenter. Throughout their duties, security guards encounter numerous situations and individuals. Given the necessity for precision in reporting and during court testimony, a properly used notebook becomes an invaluable resource.

There are several key reasons for maintaining a notebook, primarily:

Importance of Note Taking

To Aid in Recalling Details and Providing Accurate Testimony

A notebook is primarily a tool for providing precise testimony. During investigations, a substantial amount of information is collected, such as witness names and addresses, descriptions, measurements, and locations of key events. Recording these details immediately ensures they are accurately and completely remembered.

Time can erode your memory of an event. Typically, the interval between the event and the trial is at least five or six months. If you do not properly record information, critical details might be forgotten, leading to answers like “I don’t know,” “I don’t remember,” and “I’m not sure.” This can undermine your credibility in court. Judges and juries are unlikely to be impressed by someone struggling to recall a vaguely remembered incident. Your credibility is crucial, so it’s important to document the basics—the “who, what, where, when, why, and how.”

Moreover, details that seem unimportant at the time might become significant later. Thorough notes can refresh your memory and help recall the incident's intricate details.

Reflection of Your Work and Abilities

Your notebook and reports are a reflection of your abilities. Reviewers will judge your skills based on these materials. A well-maintained notebook enhances your credibility, while poorly recorded incidents might suggest sloppy work. An efficient, neat, and well-organized notebook demonstrates your organizational skills and knowledge of the law and offenses you deal with. The quality of your notes reflects the effort you put into your work.

Basis for Writing a Report

A well-organized notebook enables you to accurately depict the sequence of events for the police, your supervisor, or the client. Writing notes helps you organize and prioritize the information, ensuring clarity and completeness in your reports.

Investigative Aid

Note-taking helps you organize the material you have collected. Reviewing the facts and arranging them in chronological order can assist in understanding the entire scenario. Additionally, individuals you interact with today might be part of an investigation tomorrow. Repeat offenders and past incidents may become relevant in future cases. Facts that seemed insignificant at the time might later become crucial clues. Being able to refer back to your previous notes and incorporate that information into current investigations is essential for effective security work.

What to Write in Your Notebook

When maintaining your notebook, it's essential to include key identifying information. Begin with your name and address. Since you'll eventually fill multiple notebooks, note the date the notebook was started and finished, along with the notebook number. Always use only one notebook at a time.

Consistency and Integrity

- **Single Notebook Usage:** Security guards should avoid using separate notebooks for rough and final notes. Courts have criticized this practice, and it may lead to charges being dismissed if discrepancies are found during cross-examination. This can give the impression that evidence has been altered. Always make entries in ink to prevent any claims of tampering.
- **Chronological Order:** Keep your notes in chronological order. If you make a mistake, draw a single line through it, initial it, and rewrite the entry on the next line. Do not leave blank spaces, lines, or pages. If a space is accidentally left, draw a line through it and initial and date it. Never tear out sections or pages from your notebook.

- **Legibility and Clarity:** Ensure your entries are legible and avoid using abbreviations or shorthand unless you provide a full description the first time. The goal is for anyone reviewing your notebook to understand the content clearly.

Confidentiality and Security

- **Notebook Control:** Keep control of your notebook as it will contain confidential information such as descriptions of events, phone numbers, and addresses. Losing it or having it fall into the wrong hands could be detrimental.
- **Daily Entries:** Start each day with a new heading, recording the date, time, weather conditions, and job site location. These details can aid in recalling specific events.

Detailed Entries

Document the following throughout the day:

- **Event Details:**
 - Time the call is received, the event is viewed, or the complaint is made.
 - Nature of the incident.
 - Factual information like names and addresses.
- **Diagrams:** Include any necessary diagrams, as they can be very descriptive.
- **Evidence:**
 - Who found it.
 - Where it was found.
 - Time it was found.
 - How it was labeled.
 - Disposition.
- **Statements:** Record statements or summaries of victims' statements. Record statements from suspects or accused persons verbatim.
- **Individuals Involved:**
 - Names, including aliases and nicknames.
 - Addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of birth if possible.
 - Descriptions of individuals (clothing, age, height, weight, sex, hair and eye color, distinguishing features).
- **Property Description:**
 - Serial number, size, damage, color, make, or other identifying features.
- **Scene Description:**
 - Include diagrams and measurements as necessary.
 - Weather conditions at the scene.

By adhering to these guidelines, you ensure that your notebook is a reliable, detailed, and credible record of events.

Avoiding Profanity

- **Profanity Use:** Do not use profanity in your notebook unless it is part of a direct witness statement or a statement from the accused. Always place quotation marks around the exact words used.

Objectivity and Fact-Based Entries

- **Maintain Objectivity:** Ensure your notes and observations are as objective as possible. Record only the facts unless your opinion is directly relevant.
- **Opinions vs. Observations:** Avoid writing down your opinions; instead, focus on detailed observations. This approach helps maintain objectivity and credibility. For instance:

Opinion:

- The accused was drunk.

Observations:

- The individual staggered down the street. When I approached within about three feet, I smelled a strong odor of liquor on him. His eyes were glassy and bloodshot, and his speech was heavily slurred. I asked, "..."

By adhering to these guidelines, you can ensure that your notes remain clear, factual, and useful for recalling precise details and providing accurate testimony.

Statements

At times, a Security Guard may need to take a statement to accurately capture a witness's account of an event. The main goal of taking a statement is to ensure a precise record of the witness's memory of the incident. Statements must be taken voluntarily, with no threats or promises made to the witness.

While statement protocols may differ between companies, generally accepted practices include:

- Full name, date of birth, and identification of the witness.
- Witness's employment details and contact information.
- Address of the witness and location where the statement is taken.
- Date of the interview.
- Start and end times of the interview.
- Name of the Security Guard and the company conducting the statement.
- An introductory paragraph outlining the day's events and observations.
- A verbatim (word-for-word) transcription of the witness's account of the events.

- A closing paragraph to conclude the statement.

For instance, a closing paragraph might read: "I, (witness name), have read the above six-page statement and find it to be accurate to the best of my recollection. I have been advised that I could omit, delete, or change any part of the statement before signing it."

As demonstrated, the Security Guard should allow the witness to review the statement and request changes before signing. If a change is requested, a line should be drawn through the item being removed, and both the witness and the Security Guard should initial the beginning and end of the correction.

Writing good notes involves recording as many details as possible. It is crucial to make notes immediately after observing an event to avoid forgetting important details. Record all sensory information, not just visual. Unusual sounds or smells could be significant later. It's better to write too much than too little, as some information might prove vital. For example, if someone tries to divert your attention to the parking lot while a robbery occurs inside, having a detailed description of the person who distracted you could be crucial in an investigation.

When preparing to write a report about an observed incident, ensure your notes answer the following questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How, and Action taken.

The 24-Hour Clock

Unlike a regular 12-hour clock, which repeats numbers for both morning and evening (e.g., 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM), the 24-hour clock eliminates this confusion by assigning a unique number to each hour of the day. For example, 6:00 AM is written as 0600 hours, and 6:00 PM is written as 1800 hours. This system is widely used where precise timing is crucial, such as in airports, train stations, bus stations, military operations, police work, and the security industry. When taking notes or writing reports, and when testifying in court, you will use the 24-hour clock.

Note: Midnight can also be referred to as 0000 hours.

Converting from 12-Hour Clock to 24-Hour Clock

To convert a time from the 12-hour clock to the 24-hour clock, you simply express the number of hours since the start of the day for the first two digits, and the number of minutes since the start of the hour for the last two digits.

Example

Consider 4:30 in the afternoon. In the 24-hour clock, you add 12 hours (for the morning) to the 4 hours in the afternoon, which totals 16 hours since the start of the day. Adding the 30 minutes since the beginning of the hour, the time in the 24-hour clock is 1630.

Note: The 24-hour clock time always consists of exactly four digits without any breaks.

12-Hour Clock Time

24-Hour Clock Time

3:06 a.m.	3 hours since the beginning of the day, so the time is 0306
12:05 p.m.	12 hours since the beginning of the day, so the time is 1205
5:00 p.m.	17 hours (12 + 5) since the beginning of the day, so the time is 1700
8:14 p.m.	20 hours (12 + 8) since the beginning of the day, so the time is 2014
12:59 a.m.	0 hours since the beginning of the day, so the time is 0059

Converting from 24-Hour Clock to 12-Hour Clock

Converting times between 1:00 AM and 12:59 PM is straightforward since the numbers remain the same; you simply add "AM" or "PM." For example, 0312 is 3:12 AM and 1259 is 12:59 PM. For times from 1:00 PM to midnight, subtract 12 from the first two digits and add "PM." For example, 1432 is 2:32 PM.

Introduction to Reports

For many Security Guards, writing reports can be challenging, time-consuming, and often feels unimportant. Many investigators find report writing to be the duller aspect of an investigation. It may seem that for a few minutes of action, a guard has to spend hours completing paperwork. This lack of appreciation for report writing is concerning, especially considering it often becomes the most critical support for a Security Guard's actions.

Throughout their duties, Security Guards will encounter numerous situations requiring them to convey factual information to those who were not present during the actual event. These individuals might include co-workers, superiors, subordinates, police officers, insurance agents, private investigators, clients, media representatives, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and the court.

A Security Guard must accurately record observations made during events in a clear, concise, and logical manner. Reports serve to document the detailed facts of events, allowing others to understand what occurred. A well-crafted report should provide a complete picture of the events for the reader.

A well-written report reflects positively on the investigator and enhances their credibility. Conversely, a poorly written report can lead to the perception that the underlying work was also of poor quality.

Reports

In general, a Security Guard will complete two categories of reports:

Administrative, or "Routine" Reports

These reports are part of the regular paperwork flow through the office on any given workday. Examples include:

- Equipment requisitions
- Visitor registers
- Temporary pass registries
- Time cards indicating hours worked
- Requests for vacation leave
- Training requests
- Budgets

These reports typically involve company-generated documents with tick boxes and other tools to assist in completing them.

Operational, or "Incident" Reports

These reports describe events that your supervisor or client needs details on or non-typical incidents that draw attention during the Security Guard's duties. Examples of incidents that may generate these reports include:

- Criminal offenses such as damage to property, robbery, theft, or assault
- Fires or other emergencies
- Daily activities of strikers on a picket line

Some reports, such as those detailing shoplifting incidents, may be used by the Crown in a trial. Others may be provided to insurance companies in the event of a claim. Regardless of their use, operational reports must contain a clear and accurate description of the events.

The purpose of an operational report is threefold:

1. To become an official record of what happened
2. To record the occurrence for the writer's future reference
3. To pass the facts of an occurrence to others for various uses

Your report may become part of the official record of an incident. For example, if multiple complaints about a dangerous situation are made to the Security Guard on duty and someone is injured because nothing was done to remedy the situation, the Security Guard's report may become a crucial exhibit in an insurance claim or civil trial for liability.

Records are also important for another reason: the time lag between the commission of an offense and a trial can be long, causing memories of the event to fade. A well-written report can help you recall the details of the incident accurately when preparing for trial.

Essential Ingredients of Sound Operational Reporting

Good report writing requires attention to detail, understanding the reasons for the report, and knowing the audience. A well-crafted report is planned in advance, factually correct, and accurately describes the sequence of events in clear and concise language.

Reports must be:

- **Organized:** Before writing, gather all facts and record them in your notebook at the time of the incident or as soon as possible afterward. Organize your thoughts to address the situation effectively and present a clear picture of the events. Draft the report in chronological order.
- **Clear:** Use short and to-the-point sentences and paragraphs. Present a clear picture of what happened without unnecessary wordiness.
- **Legible:** Ensure handwritten reports are easily readable. If your handwriting is poor, print the report.
- **Complete:** Answer all relevant questions (who, what, where, when, why, and how).
- **Accurate:** Ensure all facts are correct. Do not assume or include information you do not know to be true.
- **Proofread:** Reread the report to ensure it is complete. Have a co-worker review it to confirm everything makes sense.

Key Ingredients of a Report:

To be effective, reports should include the five 'W's and 'how.' While not all questions may have answers at the time of drafting, a thorough report will try to address as many as possible. Your goal is to paint a clear picture of the event for the reader or listener.

1. WHO?

- Who was involved?
- Who was the complainant?
- Who witnessed the event?
- Who was the accused/suspect?

The "who" section describes everyone involved in the event, including victims, complainants, initiators, reactors, property owners, etc.

2. WHAT?

- What actually happened?
- What evidence is available?

This section includes a detailed description of the events, actions taken by those involved, available evidence (physical and witness statements), and what was done with the evidence.

3. **WHEN?**

- When did the event occur?

Include time and date, and lay out events in sequential order. Record when you last observed the area, when the event began and ended, when you contacted witnesses, and when emergency services arrived.

4. **WHERE?**

- Where did the event occur?

State the location of the incident, where witnesses were, where evidence was found, where the accused was located, etc.

5. **WHY?**

- Why did the event happen?
- What motive was there?

Some questions can be answered through investigation, but some may remain unanswered.

6. **HOW?**

- How did the event come to your attention?
- How did the event take place?
- How did the accused act?
- How did witnesses act?
- How was the evidence recovered?
- How was the suspect/accused arrested?

Describe how the incident occurred and the actions taken in response.

7. **ACTION TAKEN**

- What action was taken in response?
- What did Security do?

Detail the response actions taken following the observation of the incident.

Format

Reports should be written consistently to ensure a reliable product. The end-users of these reports, such as Crown prosecutors, insurance companies, and others, should be able to find the same elements in all security reports. This consistency makes it easier for them to extract essential information. Before writing a report, a Security Guard should organize the main points, including answering questions that will best help the audience understand the situation.

Report writing styles can vary, and your employer should specify the style you should use. Here are some general guidelines:

- **Write in the past tense:**
 - Example phrases: "I noted...", "I observed...", "The accused selected..."
- **Date the report with the incident date, not the investigation date.**
- **Use the legal address:**
 - Example: Use "1909 Rose Street" instead of "Heritage Mall."
- **Use the actual legal business name:**
 - Verify the business license if necessary.
- **Names should be printed with the surname (last name) first, in capital letters, followed by a comma and the first name:**
 - Example: "SMITH, John."
 - If there are middle names, use a slash between the first and middle names: "SMITH, John/J."
- **If the accused has no identification, have them spell out their name.**
 - Use the actual name, not a nickname or shortened version (e.g., "William" instead of "Bill").
 - Include any aliases or nicknames in the report.

By adhering to these guidelines, you ensure that your reports are clear, organized, and professional, making it easier for others to understand and utilize the information.