

# **The Criminal Justice Report Writing Guide for Officers**

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**The Maple Leaf Press**

**[www.YourPoliceWrite.com](http://www.YourPoliceWrite.com)**

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**ISBN-13: 978-0-578-08294-3**



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## Introduction

Effective report writing is vital to your criminal-justice career. Your reports are public documents that may be read by supervisors, attorneys, judges, citizens, and reporters. Quality reports impress superiors, win respect from colleagues, and help bring offenders to justice. They facilitate investigations and provide statistics that help shape hiring decisions, budget proposals, and policy changes.

If you work for a community agency, your reports will help you prepare for jury trials—and may even prevent cases from ending up in court. Defense attorneys who read your reports hoping to find omissions and errors may decide not to try for an acquittal after all.

In a correctional institution, your reports are the instruments that begin the disciplinary process. Inmates who experience the consequences of their behavior are more likely to conform to society's standards at the end of their sentences.

Your writing skills can help you advance in your career. You'll be prepared to communicate effectively with the media, community leaders, and government officials. Well-written reports help you create a reputation for professionalism, accuracy, and fairness that will stand you in good stead as you start to climb the career ladder.

This book offers you a wealth of information about report writing. A pretest will help you assess your strengths and determine which skills need your attention. Section I shows you how to organize and write professional reports. Sections II and III cover sentence skills, Section IV help you avoid usage errors, and Section V covers special words you need to know. A post-test helps you decide what areas need further review. Exercises are provided throughout the book, and an Answer Key allows you to check your progress at each step. Let's get started!



## INTRODUCTION

### **Resources for Instructors, Academies, and Agencies**

A supplemental booklet containing printable exercises and an Answer Key for Chapters 1 – 12 is available free to authorized users. You can also download instructional PowerPoints for the first 12 chapters. Send an email from your agency, school, or institution to [jreynoldswrite@aol.com](mailto:jreynoldswrite@aol.com).

### **Acknowledgments**

First I want to thank everyone from the Kenneth C. Thompson Institute of Public Safety who helped me learn about criminal justice and report writing: Charles E. Pottinger, the late Mary Mariani, and Don Shattler.

Cheryl Day from Polk State College helped me with word-processing issues. Dr. David Kuehl and William Fienga made valuable suggestions. Gretchen Baut from Zoemedia helped with the publishing process and created the supplemental website, [www.YourPoliceWrite.com](http://www.YourPoliceWrite.com). And, as always, I thank my husband, Charles Reynolds, for his love and support.

## PRETEST

Instructions: Complete each activity below. When you're finished, check your responses against the Answer Key beginning on page 8.

### Part I Effective Reports

Instructions: Put a check ✓ if a sentence meets the requirements for an effective report. Put an X if the sentence does not meet the requirements.

- \_\_\_ 1. I smelled alcohol on Lennon's breath.
- \_\_\_ 2. Inmate Johnson was belligerent when I entered his cell.
- \_\_\_ 3. I looked through the open front door and saw a man with both his hands around a woman's neck.
- \_\_\_ 4. Carol Todd was watching television while I questioned her husband.
- \_\_\_ 5. I saw Fowler's car cross the double line three times as he drove down Second Street.
- \_\_\_ 6. It was obvious that Fowler's driving was impaired, probably by alcohol.
- \_\_\_ 7. After looking for the point of entry, I asked Barker which items were missing from his apartment.
- \_\_\_ 8. Inmate Powers refused to cooperate.

### Part II Effective Word Choices

Instructions: Put a check ✓ if the wording of the sentence meets the requirements for a modern report. Put an X if it does not.

## PRETEST

- \_\_\_1. Sarah Wilson advised me that she had left for work at 7:45 that morning.
- \_\_\_2. A small plastic bag of white powder was found when Inmate Clem Johnson's cell was searched by this officer.
- \_\_\_3. I ascertained that Buckley had taken Hill's watch during the scuffle.
- \_\_\_4. I asked Anderson if she needed medical help, and she nodded her head up and down.
- \_\_\_5. Sawyer cursed and swore when he saw the handcuffs.
- \_\_\_6. I processed the area while Officer Gage questioned Lillian Thompson.
- \_\_\_7. The window over the kitchen sink was broken, and pieces of glass were lying on the kitchen counter.
- \_\_\_8. When I contacted Jeffrey Klein, the neighbor, he denied having seen or heard anything unusual.

### **Part III English Usage**

Instructions: Put a check  $\checkmark$  in front of any sentence that meets the requirements for English usage. Put an X in front of any sentence that does not meet the requirements.

- \_\_\_1. Paula Dillon gave permission for my partner and I to search the basement.
- \_\_\_2. The Quinns have lived in the house on Central Boulevard for two years.
- \_\_\_3. The women's descriptions of their attacker were detailed and consistent.

PRETEST

\_\_\_4. There's records of two previous calls about suspicious behavior at that address.

\_\_\_5. Felicia Jones told me that her Father had been gone all weekend.

\_\_\_6. Inmate Perkins told me that "I wouldn't find anything in his locker and should leave him alone."

\_\_\_7. The cut looked serious, it obviously needed medical attention.

\_\_\_8. The neighbor whom I interviewed gave me a description of the suspect.

## PRETEST ANSWER KEY

Page numbers refer to sections of this book with information about the skills on this test.

### Part I Effective Reports

X 1. I smelled alcohol on Lennon's breath. [Alcohol is odorless. You should say that you smelled an alcoholic beverage or liquor.]

X 2. Inmate Johnson was belligerent when I entered his cell. [Page 49: Vague. State exactly what Johnson said or did.]

√ 3. I looked through the open front door and saw a man with both his hands around a woman's neck.

√ 4. Carol Sanders was watching television while I questioned her husband.

√ 5. I saw Fowler's car cross the double line three times as he drove down Second Street.

X 6. It was obvious that Fowler's driving was impaired, probably by alcohol. [Page 49: This kind of statement may not fare well in a courtroom. State what you saw Fowler do, and omit your opinion.]

X 7. After looking for the point of entry, I asked Barker which items were missing from his apartment.

X 8. Inmate Powers refused to cooperate. [Page 49: Vague. State exactly what Powers said or did.]

### Part II Effective Word Choices

X 1. Sarah Wilson advised me that she had left for work at 7:45 that morning. [Page 169: Sarah Wilson *told* you she had left for work. Save "advise" for actual advice.]

## PRETEST ANSWER KEY

X 2. A small plastic bag of white powder was found when Inmate Clem Johnson's cell was searched by this officer. [Page 71: Avoid passive voice. A better sentence would be: "I found a small plastic bag of white powder when I searched Inmate Clem Johnson's cell." See page 51 for more about using "I" and "me" instead of the outdated phrase "this officer."]

X 3. I ascertained that Buckley had taken Hill's watch during the scuffle. [Page 167: "Ascertained" is police jargon that should be avoided. Another problem: This sentence doesn't explain how you know what Buckley had done.]

✓ 4. I asked Anderson if she needed medical help, and she nodded her head up and down.

X 5. Sawyer cursed and swore when he saw the handcuffs. [Page 173: "Curse" means to call down evil powers; "swear" means taking an oath. And you should write exactly what Sawyer said, word-for-word, instead of generalizing: See page 27.]

X 6. I processed the area while Officer Gage questioned Lillian Thompson. [Pages 56 and 167: "Processed" is vague: What did you look for, and what did you find?]

✓ 7. The window over the kitchen sink was broken, and pieces of glass were lying on the kitchen counter.

X 8. When I contacted Jeffrey Klein, the neighbor, he denied having seen or heard anything unusual. [Page 166: "Contacted" is vague: Did you phone, visit, or email Klein?]

### **Part III English Usage**

X 1. Paula Dillon gave permission for my partner and I to search the basement. [Page 127: *my partner and me*]

PRETEST ANSWER KEY

- √ 2. The Quinns have lived in the house on Central Boulevard for two years.
- √ 3. The women's descriptions of their attacker were detailed and consistent.
- X 4. There's records of two previous calls about suspicious behavior at that address. [Page 135: *There are records*]
- X 5. Felicia Jones told me that her Father had been gone all weekend. [Page 140: Lower-case *father*]
- X 6. Inmate Perkins told me that "I wouldn't find anything in his locker and should leave him alone." [Page 123: Not Perkins' exact words, so delete the quotation marks.]
- X 7. The cut looked serious, it obviously needed medical attention. [Page 86: There are two sentences; change the comma to a period, and capitalize *it*.]
- √ 8. The neighbor whom I interviewed gave me a description of the suspect.

## **Section I: Writing the Report**





## Chapter 1

### Why Is Report Writing Important?

Think back to when you first decided on a criminal justice career. What attracted you? Chances are it *wasn't* report writing. Officers frequently say that writing is *not* a favorite task: It's time consuming, tiring, and exacting—and there are serious consequences if they make a mistake.

But report writing is essential to your career as a police or corrections officer, and writing becomes even more important as you advance up the career ladder. In fact it can even help your superiors decide that you're qualified for promotions and greater responsibility.

Your reports play a vital role in the day-to-day functioning of an agency or institution. First, they attest to your professionalism. In addition, the facts and actions in your reports may be used to:

- provide data for statistical studies
- help justify an arrest or disciplinary action
- testify that you are following legal guidelines
- provide vital clues for follow-up investigation

### Who Reads Reports?

Many people both inside and outside the criminal justice system reports may read the reports you write, drawing conclusions about the choices you made when you dealt with a particular situation.

A well-written report can impress a supervisor, newspaper reporter, or defense attorney. It might be the deciding factor when a district attorney decides whether to proceed with a prosecution. Family members, community leaders, researchers, and government

## WHY IS REPORT WRITING IMPORTANT?

officials are all potential readers of your reports. It stands to reason, then, that you need to make an extra effort to write accurate, complete, and grammatical reports.

### **What Goes into a Good Report?**

Report writing can sound intimidating if you're new to the criminal justice field. It's important to know, however, that several factors are already working to your advantage. First, you're already a writer. The writing skills you learned in school will give you a good foundation to build on as you learn about report writing.

Second, help is available if you need to brush up on grammar and usage. Here's a summary of the skills you need to write effective sentences, paragraphs, and reports:

- three comma rules (page 105)
- two ways to use apostrophes (page 119)
- four pronoun rules (page 125)
- five rules for capital letters (page 139)
- six subject-verb agreement rules (page 135)

In addition, you need to master criminal-justice vocabulary (page 165), and you need to watch for some commonly misused words (your/you're, to/too, break/brake, and others—see pages 171 – 180).

And here's a tip: The chapters about Avoiding Common Errors (page 151) and Myths about Grammar (page 157) are short and readable, and they can teach you a lot about writing in a short time.

All these skills are covered in this book, and practice exercises and answers are included. You can also ask family members, friends, and co-workers to look at your writing and help you spot problem sentences. Take note: With practice, *every officer* can become a competent writer.

## WHY IS REPORT WRITING IMPORTANT?

Third—and this is perhaps the best news—report writing is predictable, even though police and corrections work is not. Most reports fall into four types. Learn the special requirements for each type, and you're assured of producing an effective report every time you sit down to write.

The bottom line is that professional writing skills are within reach of *any officer*—including you—provided, of course, that you're willing to invest the time and energy needed to be an effective writer.

### **Exercise 1 Why Are Reports Important?**

Instructions: Imagine that a friend has been talking with you about a possible career in criminal justice. He or she is looking forward to the excitement of police or corrections work. Your friend disliked English in high school and hopes to spend as little time as possible writing reports on the job.

Write a short letter explaining why report writing is important and offering suggestions for sharpening the skills needed. When you're finished, check your ideas against the list on page 189 in the Answer Key.



## Chapter 2

### Overview of Report Writing

Report formats vary from agency to agency, and from institution to institution. Some officers write their reports on blank sheets of paper, while others use paper forms or computer templates with boxes and bubbles ready to fill in. But *all* reports share some common features, and all require the same qualities:

- accuracy, brevity, and completeness
- objectivity
- a step-by-step account of the events that occurred
- details about the people and places involved

Although details may vary, depending on the agency or institution you're working for and the kind of situation you're dealing with, the basic features of a report are always the same. You begin by establishing the day and time, location, people involved, and type of incident.

What follows is a narrative (story) of what happened. There may also be witnesses, evidence, and an investigation. Finally you will wrap up your report with a conclusion: What charges were filed (if any), where evidence is stored (if any), whether medical personnel were called to the scene, and so on.

By now you're probably thinking—correctly—that you already know much of what's needed to write an effective report. You observe, ask questions, and write the information down accurately. You think about each category: What you saw, and what the outcome was. Congratulations! You're well on your way to writing effective reports.

## OVERVIEW OF REPORT WRITING

### Sample Reports

Let's examine two reports—one for a police department, and one for a correctional institution—to see how they're organized.

#### Report for a Police Department

This report was written by Officer Carole Donner when she was dispatched to a break-in.

At 3:20 p.m. on October 3, 2010, I, Officer Carole Donner, was dispatched to a break-in at 35 Woodland Road.

I talked to Sam Farley (DOB 03/11/1961), the homeowner. He told me that he had been shopping at Wal-Mart. When he arrived home at approximately 3:00 p.m., he saw the front door was slightly open. He got out his cell phone and called 911.

I went into the house and saw and heard no one. In the living room I saw an empty space on a TV stand. Mr. Farley showed me what he said was the master bedroom. A chest of drawers was against the west wall with three drawers on the floor in front of it. There were three empty spaces in the dresser. I saw clothing, men's underwear, men's shirts, and other cloth items on the floor and in the dresser drawers.

Farley told me that his SONY Bravia 32" TV (serial number RB1534780) was missing. Also missing was a Rolex watch, a diamond ring, and approximately \$225 in cash that he had put into the top dresser drawer in the master bedroom. Farley said he had photographs of the watch and ring stored in a safe deposit box at First National Bank. He promised to bring the photos to the station on Monday afternoon.

I took fingerprints from the front door, the TV stand, and the chest of drawers. I checked the windows and rear door. There were no signs of tampering.

I interviewed a neighbor, Alisa Cole (DOB 07/15/1949), in the house to the right, at 31 Woodland Road. She said she had been watching TV that afternoon. She heard a car pull into Farley's driveway sometime after 2 p.m. She had assumed it was Farley and did not get up to look. She did not hear the car pull away.

## OVERVIEW OF REPORT WRITING

I signed the fingerprints over to the officer in charge of the evidence room. I told Farley that a detective would be in touch with him.

### **Report for a Correctional Institution**

At 10:35 a.m. on July 9, 2010, I, Officer Frank Dunham, went into Building B to talk to the chaplain about plans for next month's musical program.

As I opened the door to the chaplain's office, I heard footsteps behind me. I turned and saw Inmate James Harper DC 091724 exiting the storage closet.

When he saw me, he put his hands behind his back. I told him to stop and show me what was in his hands. He said, "Don't go telling me what to do, man."

I again ordered Harper to show me what was in his hands. He turned around, and I saw three ballpoint pens in each hand. I checked his pockets and found two rolls of transparent tape.

I confiscated the pens and tape and escorted Inmate Harper to Disciplinary Confinement. I returned to Building B and reminded the chaplain about department regulations requiring the storage closet to be locked at all times.

### **A Closer Look**

Take a moment to reread these two reports. Then list the features the reports have in common. When you're finished, compare your list to the list below.

Here are some of the features you might have noticed:

- The reports have a beginning, middle, and end
- Both officers explained why they were at the scene
- The date, time, and place were recorded, along with names of persons they talked to
- The officers recorded what they saw and did, along with what they were told
- The reports ended with a wrap-up explaining the outcome of the situation



## OVERVIEW OF REPORT WRITING

You might also have noticed that the officers used “I” and “me” when referring to themselves. They wrote clear, simple sentences, and they stuck to the facts, avoiding opinions and guesses about what had happened.

### **The Stages of Report Writing**

Like any writing task, report writing proceeds in three stages: Preparation, drafting, and revising.

*Preparation* includes observing, interviewing, investigating, and taking notes.

*Drafting* involves organizing and recording the information on paper or a laptop. You may be given a paper form with spaces for names, date, location, offense, and other information. If you're using a laptop, you'll be typing this information into spaces on the screen.

*Revising* includes spellchecking, verifying information, and checking for correct English usage, clarity, completeness, and professional style.

This book will offer you tips for effectively completing every step in the report-writing process.

### **Meeting the Challenge**

Officers new to the criminal justice field sometimes underestimate the sophisticated thinking skills required for effective report writing. As you write your report, you may need to:

- blend two sets of stories—what happened before you arrived at the scene, and what you observed yourself
- accurately recall and record what witnesses and suspects tell you
- sift through conflicting accounts to determine what really happened

## OVERVIEW OF REPORT WRITING

- select the information needed for follow-up investigation, if necessary
- eliminate bias and emotion from your account
- justify your actions
- build a strong case for prosecution and conviction

Here are some important points to remember when you write a report:

### 1. Use names.

Avoid labels like “victim” or “suspect,” which quickly become confusing. Give the person's full name the first time, and then switch to last names only. If two or more people have the same last name, you can use their first names. Don't use “Mr.” and “Mrs.”: Once you've established the family name as “Johnson,” you can refer to the spouses by their first names.

### 2. Be efficient.

Don't write “month of September”: September is always a month. Don't write “for the purpose of” when you mean “for” or “to.” You can see a list of time-wasting words and expressions beginning on page 165.

### 3. Don't write statements that might be challenged.

Avoid hunches, guesses, and predictions. Don't say, for example, that a suspect *attempted, tried, intended, or planned* to do a particular action. Write only what you've seen or heard: You saw the suspect climb a tree, break a window, and enter the house. (See page 49 to learn more.)

### 4. Be complete.

If you gave a sobriety test or looked for fingerprints, include the results, even if they were negative. If you took evidence away from the scene, list each item and explain what happened to it (“chain of custody”). If you called for an ambulance or provided a victim's brochure, note those actions in your report.

## OVERVIEW OF REPORT WRITING

### 5. Don't generalize.

Words like *upset*, *enraged*, *scared*, *nervous*, and *disturbed* are too vague for a criminal justice report and can cause problems for you in a courtroom. Describe exactly what you saw or heard: Shaking hands, darting eyes, clenched fists.

Other vague words to avoid are *weapon* (Smith-Wesson revolver? shotgun? X-Acto knife? baseball bat?), *fed* (phoned? visited? emailed?), and *noticed* (heard? saw?).

### 6. Be prepared to describe some of the physical details of a scene.

Practice ahead of time so that you can easily identify north, south, east, and west in any area in your agency's jurisdiction or your correctional institution. Know the length of your stride so that you can estimate lengths and distances. Train yourself to notice height, eye color, skin color, clothing, and distinctive characteristics: facial hair, tattoos, eyeglasses, and jewelry. If your cell phone has a camera feature, learn how to use it.

### 7. Write like the professional you are.

If you're writing on a computer, use the spellchecker and grammar checker. These electronic tools are not foolproof, but they will catch many errors. Make a list of words that you have difficulty spelling, and make sure it's handy whenever you write a report. Whenever possible, have someone read over your reports before you submit them to a supervisor.

## **Exercise 2 Rewrite a Paragraph**

Instructions: A paragraph from a police report is printed below. Using what you have learned, evaluate the paragraph. (Do not be concerned about the parts of the report that have been omitted.) When you're finished, go to page 189 to check your answers.

## OVERVIEW OF REPORT WRITING

*...Victim 1 [Ted Wilkins, DOB 8/13/75] seemed upset. I didn't think I'd get any useful information from him, so I began to interview Victim 2 (Geena Wilkins, wife, DOB 5/10/77]. She was calmer and described the intruder. She said he was about 5' 10", white, with brown eyes and brown hair. He had no facial hair. He was wearing dark-blue jeans, a red plaid shirt, and white lace-up shoes. She seemed intelligent when I was talking to her, so I figured she was probably accurate. I checked the door for signs of forced entry, and then I checked to see if the windows were locked....*



## Chapter 3

### Preparing to Write

A good report begins before you start writing. As you're observing, interviewing, and taking notes, you need to make an extra effort to ensure that you have all the facts needed for a complete report. Here are some important guidelines:

1. Be prepared to take notes.

Of course you have writing paper (and perhaps a laptop). But what if you jump out of your patrol car to deal with an emergency? It's embarrassing to be caught without writing materials. Go to the Dollar Store and buy a few tiny notebooks. Keep one in a pocket, along with a couple of pens, just in case you need it. (A reminder: If you keep your notes, they're subject to subpoena. Don't mix personal information with your job-related notes.)

2. Think about categories.

Train yourself to think in six categories: **yourself**, **victims**, **witnesses**, **suspects**, **evidence**, and **disposition**. You won't necessarily organize your report in these categories. But thinking about them will ensure that you don't overlook anything important. (You'll learn more about these categories beginning on page 31.)

3. Think about the type of report you'll be rewriting.

If you've thoroughly familiarized yourself with the types of reports and their special requirements, you're more likely to cover every angle. For example, a Type 4 report (officer sets the case in motion) may have to deal with probable cause issues in some detail. You can learn more about types of reports beginning on page 39.

## PREPARING TO WRITE

### 4. Train yourself to observe and remember.

Make an extra effort to look, listen, and remember, especially when you first arrive at a potential crime scene. Look for skid marks, broken shrubbery, and shattered glass. Listen for voices, and be able to label them: a man? a woman? a child? Is furniture tipped over? Do you smell alcoholic beverages? Look for blood and injuries, and be prepared to describe what you observed in detail.

### 5. Record information promptly and thoroughly.

Don't rely on your memory to add details later. It's embarrassing to be caught with an inaccurate or incomplete report. Discipline yourself to write a complete set of notes as soon as possible.

This completeness requirement may sound easy: Just write down everything that happened, right?

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Officers often forget to record a piece of essential information. For example, an officer might mention a sobriety test but forget to record the results. Or an officer will forget to note that she wasn't the one who interviewed a witness: It was her partner. Problems can arise later on when an investigation stalls or a court hearing has to be postponed because important facts are missing.

## **Interviews**

Talking to witnesses, suspects, and victims can present challenges: Stress levels are likely to be high, and you may be listening to a jumble of relevant and irrelevant information. Sorting everything out and accurately recording what you heard can be a complex and time-consuming task.

1. Deal with emotions first. Reassure the person you're talking to (“You're safe” or “We've got the situation under control”). Then explain that you need the person's help in order to follow up.

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When you're calm and professional, the person who's talking is more likely to cooperate and answer your questions. Don't hesitate to break in, gently, if a witness goes off on a tangent.

2. Provide as much privacy as you can during the interview. Witnesses may be more forthcoming when they're not observed, especially if the suspect is at the scene.

3. Remember that hearsay is permissible in criminal justice reports—and it can provide valuable clues for investigators.

Some perpetrators have a consistent, repetitive pattern of words and actions. So go ahead and record what a witness heard and saw, even though you're getting the information secondhand.

4. Use quotation marks in your notes any time you write down a witness or suspect's exact words. That information may be useful in a court hearing later on.

5. Don't rely on your memory. You can't always predict how much time will pass before you get a chance to write up your notes as a formal report.

6. Record slang and bad language, even if it sounds unprofessional. Knowing a suspect's exact words may be useful in an investigation or court hearing later on, for example. Be sure to ask for explanations if a witness or suspect uses unusual slang or vague language. Children, too, may have difficulty finding the right word.

### **Completeness**

Here are some tips to ensure your report is complete:

1. Make an extra effort to get contact information from anyone who might assist in an investigation, especially in a major case. If you



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suspect you might have difficulty reaching a victim or witness, ask for a backup telephone number for a friend or family member.

2. Always include the results of an investigation, even if the results were negative.

Sometimes the absence of evidence can be as important as something you find. Suppose, for example, someone returns to the scene later to plant evidence there that might incriminate an innocent person. Your written statement that the weapon (or fingerprints or bloodstains) weren't there when you did your investigation can change the outcome of the case.

Here are some examples of things you might look for that should be documented in your report, no matter what results you get:

- point of entry or exit
- missing or damaged items
- vehicular damage
- signs of trauma
- signs of substance abuse
- evidence of a break-in
- fingerprints
- results of a sobriety test
- evidence of vehicular damage
- blood and other bodily fluids

3. Be particularly careful to document evidence that establishes probable cause, especially in Type 4 situations when you, the officer, set the case in motion—a traffic stop, for example. Even a strong case against a suspect can be thrown out of court if you can't establish a solid reason for getting involved.

4. Remember to document any steps you've taken to protect a crime scene, such as marking the area with crime tape or posting an officer to screen visitors.

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5. Be sure to establish a chain of custody for evidence. What items did you remove from the scene, and what actions (tag, package, mark, sketch, log) did you take?

### Exercise 3 Preparing to Write

Instructions: Choose the correct answer to each question below. When you're finished, check your answers on page 190.

1. Dealing with a victim's emotions
  - a) is not part of an officer's job
  - b) should usually be the first step in an interview
  - c) should be done only after all the facts are recorded
  - d) is rarely necessary
2. "Chain of custody"
  - a) refers to transporting a suspect
  - b) refers to filing a report
  - c) refers to evidence taken at the scene
  - d) does not need to be recorded in a report
3. Having extra paper and pens in a pocket
  - a) may be helpful in an emergency
  - b) is unprofessional
  - c) violates most agency's regulations
  - d) may damage an officer's uniform
4. Which of the following does *not* need to be documented in a report?
  - a) results of a sobriety test
  - b) vehicular damage

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- c) point of entry
- d) the officer's theories about how and why the crime was committed

### 5. Slang

- a) has no place in a report
- b) may require a definition if it's unfamiliar
- c) should be used only if it's grammatical
- d) should be used only if it's easily understood

## ANSWER KEY

### Exercise 1 Why is Report Writing Important?

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Answers will vary. Here are some ideas you could have included in your letter:

- Your reports may be read by supervisors, the media, community leaders, and attorneys, who will be forming an opinion about you, based on what you've written.
- Your reports may help investigators uncover the truth about what happened.
- Accurate reports establish that you were properly following procedures.
- Effective reports provide information for statistical reports, help you prepare to testify in court, and may even keep you from having to testify.
- An effective report may help persuade the district attorney to prosecute a crime.
- A report may help investigators who are looking for a pattern of criminal behavior.
- You can improve your writing skills by studying the rules of English usage and asking a friend, relative, or co-worker to review what you've written.

### Exercise 2 Rewrite a Paragraph

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Here are some problems you might have noted and corrected:

- Labels like *Victim 1*, *Victim 2*, and *Witness 1* can be confusing later, especially if you're preparing to testify in court. Use people's names.
- Judgments and opinions ("seemed upset," "intelligent," "probably accurate") do not belong in a police report. Simply delete them.
- The officer mentioned checking the door and windows but didn't state the results. Even if you don't find anything, you should document what you were looking for. Including that information shows that you were following procedures and may be helpful later on, as the investigation develops. Suppose, for example, someone tries later on to manufacture signs of forced entry. Your report will help prove what happened.

ANSWER KEY

**Exercise 3 Preparing to Write**

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1. Dealing with a victim's emotions
  - a) is not part of an officer's job
  - b) should usually be the first step in an interview CORRECT**
  - c) should be done only after all the facts are recorded
  - d) is rarely necessary
2. "Chain of custody"
  - a) refers to transporting a suspect
  - b) refers to filing a report
  - c) refers to evidence taken at the scene CORRECT**
  - d) does not need to be recorded in a report
3. Having extra paper and pens in a pocket
  - a) may be helpful in an emergency CORRECT**
  - b) is unprofessional
  - c) violates most agency's regulations
  - d) may damage an officer's uniform
4. Which of the following does *not* need to be documented in a report?
  - a) results of a sobriety test
  - b) vehicular damage
  - c) point of entry
  - d) the officer's theories about how and why the crime was committed CORRECT**
5. Slang
  - a) has no place in a report
  - b) may require a definition if it's unfamiliar CORRECT**
  - c) should be used only if it's grammatical