

Report Writing

Study Session Overview

This Study Session will introduce you to the characteristics of a good report, give you some tips for improving your report writing, and prepare you for in-class work with report writing. This Study Session should be completed before Mod 03 Ses 10 (see schedule).

Learner Objectives

- Write narrative reports in keeping with the listed characteristics of a good report.
- Write reports free of spelling errors.
- Utilize proofreading techniques to ensure reports are error-free.
- Develop report writing checklists for common calls.

Total Session Time: 1 hour

Main Topics of Session:

- *Purposes of Reports*
- *Characteristics of a Good Report*
- *Spelling and Homonyms*
- *Outlining and Getting the Facts Straight First*
- *Making a Report Checklist*

Attached Materials:

- *ATTACHMENT - Spelling Words*
- *ATTACHMENT - Homonyms*

You May Bring to Class:

- *[OPTIONAL] Report Checklist (to share with other students)*



Report Writing



Background

Writing reports is a major part of being a law enforcement officer. If you've ever been out on patrol or spoken to a law enforcement officer, you know that many hours per shift are spent recording information on paper or in electronic format. A competent police officer is expected to be able to write excellent reports. This Study Session will focus on the report narrative - the story.

Police reports serve many purposes:

- Your report is the “official memory” of an event. It is the last word.
- Reports are legal documents and are used throughout the judicial system.
- Police reports are expected to be unbiased - meaning they favor neither one side nor the other. They only represent the facts, and the facts speak for themselves.
- Your report may be the difference in a dangerous criminal being incarcerated or going free. Your report establishes proof and evidence that is used in criminal and civil trials to establish guilt or innocence.
- Police reports are used by many individuals and agencies outside of law enforcement.

Reflective Exercise - What makes a good report?

If you could only choose two characteristics of a good report, what would they be? Write your response here.



IMPORTANT POINT

Most of the people reading your police report are NOT law enforcement officers! They are from other agencies and organizations. This is a key point to remember. These people may not know police work and the law like we do. It is our responsibility to explain the situation and the elements of crimes in enough detail so any person can understand it.

NOTES

Report Writing



What Makes a Good Report?

- **Sequential Organization** - Your report should be organized so that it has a natural flow and is easy to read. If your report confuses the reader or jumps around, it's not a good report. Most officers have a certain style they stick to when writing their reports. Having a style and a mental template for reports can be a big help when there is a lot of information to get down on paper.

Chronological order is the preferred way to list the details of an incident in a police report. People know what to expect when a story is retold in the order it actually occurred. There are two ways to write a report chronologically.

1. Start with the Officer - This method of report writing begins with your involvement and follows you and your fellow officers as you experience the call. Tell the reader about the events in the order you did/encountered them. This method of writing is the most common in emergency service report writing.

2. Start with the Story - This method of report writing begins at the start of the incident (before you were involved). Then at some point in the narrative, you and your fellow officers will enter the story. Continue through the events as things happened in real life. This method requires a bit more work as the writer, but makes for a more readable report.

Both of these options are acceptable. Just make sure to stick with the format once you start your report.

- **Accurate** - Your report is expected to be error free. As a professional law enforcement officer, you are expected to get it right every time. Your report is a permanent record of your abilities to methodically and systematically do police work. Even simple mistakes can seriously damage your credibility and could jeopardize a whole case. Assumptions that cannot be proven are another form of error you should avoid in your report.
- **Complete** - Your report should give all the relevant facts of the case - even facts that are not "helpful" to the case. As impartial and unbiased professionals, our report should relay the facts and evidence and let it speak for itself. Your reader should not finish your report and have unanswered questions.

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Report Writing

- **Descriptive** - Remember that the vast majority of people reading your report were not there with you. They need you to describe everything so they can understand what you understand. Your report should “paint a picture” for the reader. It’s been said that a police report cannot have too many details.
- **Grammatically Correct** - Simple spelling and grammar errors can take a great report and destroy it. If a reader starts to question your intelligence because of simple writing mistakes, how will they feel about your ability to handle a complicated police case? If you can’t spell police-related words, how can you be trusted to handle police-related matters?
- **Professional Tone** - Your report should convey a professional and businesslike tone. It should not include slang, police jargon, or inappropriate terms that would reflect poorly on you or your department. You are expected to conduct your duties respectfully. Your report should read as a matter-of-fact record of the incident, without your personal feelings or attitudes influencing the “feel” of the report.
- **Clear** - Your report should make sense. The reader should be better off after reading it. If your report confuses the reader, it’s not a good report. Don’t use fancy words when simple ones will do. Don’t try to impress your reader with a big vocabulary. Simply explain the events in a clear and precise way. Your words should not get in the way of the story you are telling.
- **Clearly Establish Your Reasonable Suspicion and/or PC** - If you have detained or arrested a person, or you have submitted the case for filing of charges, your report should leave no doubt about the reasoning for your actions. It is not enough to write, “*Smith committed theft.*” You should break down the offense and the elements of the crime and methodically list them out for the reader.

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IMPORTANT POINT

A law enforcement officer’s reputation is built upon many factors. One of those factors is his or her report writing abilities. In fact, many people in your department and prosecutor’s office will know you by name - even though they’ve never met you. They will know your name from your reports. Your report writing skills can drastically enhance, or seriously damage, your reputation as a law enforcement officer.



Report Writing



Spelling - Yes, It's a Big Deal!

As mentioned above, simple spelling errors can really hurt an otherwise good report. There are many resources available to help you get better at spelling and grammar. Check your local book store, library, or the Internet.

**STUDY**

STUDY MATERIAL - ATTACHMENT - Spelling Words ATTACHMENT - Homonyms

Instructions: These attachments contain a listing of commonly misspelled and confused words. Use these attachments to study the words you don't know. Or you may simply use them to look up words whenever you need.

NOTES



Getting the Facts Straight First

Many new officers have trouble when it's time to sit down and write the report about an incident. They struggle to organize the facts and events in their mind. It's very difficult to write a clear report if the story isn't clear in your head first!

If you still have questions about what happened, you may not be ready to write the report just yet. Maybe you should go ask some more questions. Re-contact the victims and witnesses. Speak with the other officers at the scene. Call dispatch. Do whatever you need to in order to clarify the story for yourself.

A great way to make sure you're really ready to write your report is to "outline" it first. On some scratch paper, make rough notes about the incident. Do it in chronological order. Get the details in the proper order on your scratch paper before you try to turn it into a narrative-style report. Move details around until it all flows from start to finish. This strategy is extremely helpful for complicated cases. It's well worth the investment of a few minutes if it saves hours off your time to write the actual report.



Report Writing



Proofreading

Many mistakes can be caught before submitting your report by proofreading your work. There are many great proofreading tips. Use your experience and your resources (books, Internet, etc.) to jot down five proofreading tips:

Tip 1.

Tip 2.

Tip 3.

Tip 4.

Tip 5.

NOTES



STUDY

RECOMMENDED STUDY - Report Writing Checklist

Instructions: Take a few minutes to make a report writing checklist for a certain type of police call. What kinds of information would you expect to see in a report for this kind of call? Try to put the items in the order they might occur.

Here are some kinds of calls. Choose one of these or any other kind of call you wish.

- Burglary
- Auto theft
- Shoplift
- DV
- Death Investigation
- Fight

See if other students in your class completed this activity. Share your checklists with each other. Did they include some items you didn't think of?



END OF STUDY SESSION



Report Writing – Homonyms

Student Study Guide

These are words that sound the same but have different meanings and spellings. Do you know when to use one or the other?

- Accept / except
- Affect / effect
- Are / our
- Assistance / assistants
- Bale / bail
- Beat / beet
- Boar / bore
- Board / bored
- Bread / bred
- Break / brake
- Bridal / bridle
- Buy / by / bye
- Capital / capitol
- Ceiling / sealing
- Cent / sent / scent
- Cereal / serial
- Chord / cord
- Cite / sight / site
- Conscience / conscious
- Council / counsel
- Current / currant
- Die / dye
- Hole / whole
- Idle / idol
- Its / It's
- Knot / not
- Know / no
- Lain / lane
- Lessen / lesson
- Liable / libel
- Lie / lye
- Loan / lone
- Lose / loose
- Made / maid
- Maybe / may be
- Meat / meet
- Medal / meddle
- Muscle / mussel
- Naval / navel
- Oar / or / ore
- Ordinance / ordnance
- Pail / pale
- Pain / pane
- Pair / pare / pear
- Pause / paws
- Peace / piece
- Peal / peel
- Pedal / peddle
- Peer / pier
- Plain / plane
- Presence / presents
- Pride / pried
- Principal / principle
- Rain / reign / rein
- Raise / rays / raze
- Rap / wrap
- Real / reel
- Right / rite / write
- Road / rode / rowed
- Role / roll
- Sail / sale
- Scene / seen
- Seam / seem
- Seize / seas / sees
- Sense / cents
- Serf / surf
- Shear / sheer
- Shone / shown



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

This is a list of words that are commonly misspelled and/or specific to law enforcement.

A

- Abandon
- Absence
- Absorption
- Accelerate
- Accelerator
- Acceptance
- Accessible
- Accessory
- Accommodate
- Accomplice
- Accordance
- According
- Accumulate
- Accustomed
- Achieve
- Acquaintance
- Acquire
- Acquit
- Across
- Address
- Adequate
- Adjacent
- Adjoining
- Adjourn
- Administration
- Administrator
- Admission
- Admonish
- Admonition
- Adultery
- Advantageous
- Advertise
- Advice
- Advisable
- Advise
- Affidavit
- Affiliated
- Affirmative
- Again
- Aggravate
- Aggressive
- Agree
- Alcoholic
- Alias
- Alignment
- Allege
- Aluminum
- Always
- Ambience
- Ammunition
- Analysis
- Analyze
- Anonymous
- Answer
- Anticipation
- Antidote
- Anxiety
- Apologetic
- Apologize
- Apparent
- Appear
- Appetite
- Application
- Apply
- Appraise
- Apprehend
- Apprehension
- Appropriate
- Approximately
- Argument
- Around
- Arraignment
- Arrest
- Arson
- Arterial
- Artery
- Article
- Articulate
- Artificial
- Ascertain
- Asphyxiate
- Assassinate
- Assault
- Assess
- Assign
- Associate
- Association
- Assortment
- Asterisk
- Athletic
- Attack
- Attempt
- Attorney
- Attribute
- Auditor
- Authentic
- Authority
- Automatic
- Auxiliary
- Available
- Aversion

B

- Bachelor
- Bail
- Bandage
- Bankruptcy
- Barricade
- Beginning
- Behavior
- Beige
- Believable
- Believe
- Belligerent
- Bench
- Bicycle
- Bigamy
- Bond
- Bookmaking
- Boulevard



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

- Breach
 - Bribery
 - Brief
 - Brilliant
 - Bruise
 - Building
 - Bullet
 - Bulletin
 - Bureau
 - Burglary
 - Business
- C**
- Cache
 - Cadaver
 - Cafeteria
 - Calendar
 - Caliber
 - Campaign
 - Cancel
 - Cancellation
 - Candidate
 - Capacity
 - Captain
 - Carbine
 - Carnal
 - Carrying
 - Cartridge
 - Cashier
 - Casualty
 - Category
 - Cause
 - Ceiling
 - Cemetery
 - Challenge
 - Changeable
 - Characteristic
 - Chauffeur
 - Chief
 - Chiropractor
 - Circle
 - Circuit
 - Circumstance
 - Circumstantial
- Citation
 - Citizen
 - Clientele
 - Clothe
 - Clothes
 - Coerce
 - Coercion
 - Coherent
 - Collaborate
 - Collateral
 - Collision
 - Colonel
 - Column
 - Comatose
 - Comb
 - Coming
 - Commemorate
 - Commercial
 - Commission
 - Commit
 - Committal
 - Committee
 - Common
 - Community
 - Comparative
 - Competitor
 - Complainant
 - Complaint
 - Complexion
 - Conceal
 - Concede
 - Conclude
 - Conclusive
 - Condemn
 - Confidence
 - Confidential
 - Congratulation
 - Consensus
 - Consent
 - Consequently
 - Conspicuous
 - Conspiracy
 - Construction
- Continue
 - Continuous
 - Controversy
 - Convenience
 - Convenient
 - Convertible
 - Convict
 - Conviction
 - Cooperate
 - Corporal
 - Corporation
 - Correspond
 - Corroborate
 - Cough
 - Counsel
 - Counterfeit
 - Course
 - Courteous
 - Credence
 - Creditor
 - Criminal
 - Crisis
 - Criticism
 - Criticize
 - Critique
 - Cruising
 - Cumulate
 - Cumulative
 - Curfew
 - Curiosity
 - Currency
 - Custody
 - Cycle
 - Cylinder
- D**
- Damage
 - Debtor
 - Deceased
 - Deceive
 - Decision
 - Defective
 - Defendant
 - Defer



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

- Deferred
 - Deficiency
 - Definitely
 - Defraud
 - Degenerate
 - Delinquent
 - Descend
 - Description
 - Desirable
 - Despair
 - Despondent
 - Diesel
 - Different
 - Dilemma
 - Dining
 - Disappear
 - Disappoint
 - Disbursement
 - Discipline
 - Discrepancy
 - Disinterested
 - Dismissed
 - Disorderly
 - Dispatch
 - Dissatisfied
 - Dissipate
 - Distinguish
 - Disturbance
 - Dormitory
 - Double
 - Drastically
 - Dual
 - During
- E**
- Efficiency
 - Elaborate
 - Eligibility
 - Eligible
 - Eliminate
 - Embarrass
 - Embezzlement
 - Emergency
 - Emphasis
- Employee
 - Encouraging
 - Endorsement
 - Enormous
 - Enthusiasm
 - Entrapment
 - Equal
 - Equilibrium
 - Equipment
 - Equipped
 - Erratic
 - Essence
 - Essential
 - Evidence
 - Exaggerate
 - Exceed
 - Except
 - Exceptionally
 - Excessive
 - Executive
 - Exhaust
 - Exhibition
 - Existence
 - Extortion
 - Extraordinary
- F**
- Facilities
 - Fallacy
 - Falsify
 - Familiar
 - Fascinating
 - Feasible
 - Felony
 - Fictitious
 - Financial
 - Firearm
 - Flexible
 - Fluctuation
 - Forgery
 - Fortunate
 - Forty
 - Fracture
 - Fraud
- Fraudulent
 - Frequent
 - Fugitive
 - Fundamental
- G**
- Gamble
 - Genuine
 - Gesture
 - Grandeur
 - Grievance
 - Grieve
 - Guarantee
 - Guardian
 - Guidance
- H**
- Handicapped
 - Handkerchief
 - Harass
 - Hazard
 - Headache
 - Hearsay
 - Height
 - Hemorrhage
 - Hence
 - Hideous
 - Homicide
 - Hostile
 - Hydrant
 - Hydraulic
 - Hygiene
 - Hygienic
- I**
- Illegitimate
 - Illustrate
 - Immediate
 - Immense
 - Impossible
 - Incident
 - Incidentally
 - Incite
 - Inconvenience
 - Incurable



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

- Indecent
- Indelible
- Indicate
- Indictment
- Indispensable
- Individual
- Inevitable
- Inferred
- Informant
- Initial
- Injunction
- Injured
- Injury
- Innocent
- Inquest
- Inquire
- Inquiry
- Installation
- Instrument
- Insufficient
- Insurance
- Insurrection
- Integrity
- Intellectual
- Intelligence
- Intent
- Intercede
- Intercept
- Intermittent
- Interrogate
- Interruption
- Intersection
- Interview
- Intimate
- Intoxication
- Investigation
- Irrelevant
- Irreparable
- Irresistible
- Itemize

J

- Jealous
- Jeopardize

- Jeopardy
- Jewelry
- Journal
- Judge
- Judgment
- Judicial
- Judiciary
- Jurisdiction
- Juvenile

K

- Khaki
- Kidnap
- Kindergarten
- Kleptomania
- Knife
- Knowingly
- Knowledge

L

- Label
- Laboratory
- Larceny
- Lascivious
- Latent
- Legal
- Legality
- Legitimate
- Leisure
- Length
- Lewd
- Liability
- Liable
- Libel
- License
- Lien
- Lieutenant
- Liquor
- Literal
- Litigation
- Lividity
- Logical
- Loiter
- Lucrative

M

- Magnificent
- Maim
- Maintenance
- Major
- Malfeasance
- Malicious
- Management
- Maneuver
- Manslaughter
- Manual
- Manufacturer
- Marital
- Martial
- Massacre
- Material
- Mathematic
- Mediocre
- Miniature
- Minimum
- Miscellaneous
- Mischief
- Mischievous
- Misdemeanor
- Mistrial
- Mitigate
- Molest
- Monotonous
- Mortgage
- Mortician
- Motive
- Murmur
- Mustache
- Mutual

N

- Narcotic
- Necessarily
- Necessary
- Negative
- Negligence
- Negligent
- Negotiable
- Negotiate



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

- Neighbor
- Neighborhood
- Nervous
- Neurotic
- Newsstand
- Niece
- Ninety
- Notary
- Noticeable
- Notify
- Notorious
- Noxious
- Nuisance
- O**
- Obedient
- Obligation
- Obnoxious
- Obscene
- Observe
- Obsolete
- Obstacle
- Occasion
- Occur
- Occurrence
- Odor
- Offend
- Offense
- Official
- Omission
- Omitted
- Operate
- Opportunity
- Ordinance
- Ordinarily
- Overt
- Overwhelming
- Oxygen
- P**
- Pacifist
- Pamphlet
- Panderer
- Parachute
- Parallel
- Parenthesis
- Parole
- Partial
- Participate
- Pastime
- Patience
- Patient
- Pawn
- Peaceable
- Peculiar
- Peddler
- Pedestrian
- Penalty
- Perceive
- Peril
- Perjury
- Permanent
- Perpendicular
- Persecute
- Perseverance
- Persistent
- Personnel
- Perspiration
- Persuade
- Petition
- Philosophy
- Physical
- Physician
- Plagiarism
- Plaintiff
- Plausible
- Pneumatic
- Pneumonia
- Politician
- Polygamy
- Polygraph
- Possess
- Practically
- Precede
- Precisely
- Predictable
- Preferred
- Prejudice
- Preliminary
- Premeditate
- Prescribe
- Prescription
- Presume
- Presumptuous
- Previous
- Prior
- Privilege
- Probability
- Probably
- Probation
- Procedure
- Proceed
- Procure
- Pronunciation
- Prosecutor
- Prostitute
- Prostitution
- Provocation
- Provoke
- Psychology
- Pursue
- Pursuit
- Pyrotechnic
- Q**
- Quality
- Quantity
- Questionnaire
- Quiet
- Quite
- R**
- Racial
- Raid
- Ransom
- Realize
- Reasonable
- Receipt
- Receive
- Recidivist
- Reckless
- Recognizance
- Recognize



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

- Recommend
 - Recruit
 - Refer
 - Reference
 - Refuse
 - Registration
 - Relevant
 - Remand
 - Remiss
 - Remittance
 - Repetition
 - Representative
 - Reputation
 - Requisition
 - Rescind
 - Resilience
 - Resistance
 - Responsibility
 - Responsible
 - Restaurant
 - Restitution
 - Restrain
 - Rhythmical
 - Ridiculous
 - Robbery
 - Routine
- S**
- Sacrifice
 - Salable
 - Satisfactory
 - Schedule
 - Scissors
 - Scrutiny
 - Search
 - Secretary
 - Seize
 - Separate
 - Sergeant
 - Sheriff
 - Shoplift
 - Sidearm
 - Significant
 - Silence
- Similar
 - Simultaneous
 - Sincere
 - Sincerely
 - Slander
 - Sober
 - Sobriety
 - Society
 - Sodomy
 - Solemn
 - Solicit
 - Specific
 - Specimen
 - Spontaneous
 - Spurious
 - Statistic
 - Statute
 - Strength
 - Strictly
 - Subject
 - Submit
 - Subpoena
 - Substantial
 - Succeed
 - Succession
 - Sudden
 - Sufficient
 - Summons
 - Superintendent
 - Supersede
 - Supervisor
 - Supplement
 - Surprise
 - Surveillance
 - Suspect
 - Suspend
 - Suspicion
 - Suspicious
 - Swindle
 - Sympathy
 - Symptom
- T**
- Tamper
- Tangible
 - Tantalize
 - Tariff
 - Tattoo
 - Taunt
 - Technical
 - Technique
 - Telephone
 - Temperature
 - Temporarily
 - Temporary
 - Tenant
 - Tentative
 - Testimony
 - Thesis
 - Thorough
 - Thought
 - Threat
 - Tongue
 - Tort
 - Tourniquet
 - Toxic
 - Traffic
 - Tragedy
 - Trajectory
 - Transfer
 - Transient
 - Tremendous
 - Trespass
 - Truly
 - Tuition
 - Twelfth
- U**
- Unanimous
 - Unauthorized
 - Unbearable
 - Unconscious
 - Undecided
 - Undoubtedly
 - Undulate
 - Unfortunate
 - Uniform
 - Unify



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

- Unique
- Universe
- Unmanageable
- Unnecessary
- Until
- Urgent
- Using
- Utility
- Utilize

V

- Vacancy
- Vacillate
- Vacuum
- Vagrancy
- Vagrant
- Vague
- Value
- Vandalism
- Vegetable
- Vehicle
- Vehicular
- Velocity
- Vengeance
- Venue
- Verbal
- Verdict
- Verify
- Version
- Vertical
- Vicinity
- Vicious
- Victim
- Villain
- Visible
- Vital
- Vivisection
- Volume
- Voluntary
- Volunteer
- Voucher

W

- Warehouse
- Warrant

- Weird
- Welfare
- Whiskey
- Width
- Wiring
- Witness
- Wound
- Wrapper
- Wreck
- Writ

Y

- Yacht
- Young



Report Writing – Spelling Words

Student Study Guide

Use this page to add any more words you wish.

