

# Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training

## Basic Curriculum Model Lesson Plan

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**LESSON TITLE: REPORT WRITING 7.1**

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| SUBJECT:                | Report Writing   |
| AZ POST DESIGNATION:    | 7.1  |
| HOURS:                  | 28   |
| COURSE CONTENT:         | <p>A discussion of the defining characteristics of good reports and field notes and the importance and uses of each. The form, style and procedures for writing various reports are described and techniques for developing a complete, descriptive and accurate narrative are provided. Elements of composition, required substance, proper and improper conclusions and descriptions of persons and property are addressed. Practice in taking notes and writing reports is emphasized and proficiency must be demonstrated.</p>   |
| PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: | <p>Upon completion of this course of instruction, students using notes, handouts and other support materials as references, within the allotted time, will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>7.1.1 Identify the difference between an administrative and an operational report.</li><li>7.1.2 Identify the following uses of police reports:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Provide a permanent record of the facts of an incident (reference document, e.g., court evidence, investigations, etc.).</li><li>B. Use in coordinating follow-up activities for an incident.</li><li>C. Provide the basis for an officer evaluation.</li><li>D. Provide statistical data (e.g., crime reports, shift activity reports, etc.).</li></ul></li><li>7.1.3 Given written, verbal or visual descriptions of the types of incidents listed below, record clear and accurate notes and write a report demonstrating the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Essential characteristics.</li></ul></li></ul> |

1. Accuracy.
2. Conciseness.
3. Completeness (who, what, why, when, where and how).
4. Clarity.
5. Legibility.
6. Objectivity.
7. Proper grammar (avoid slang and jargon, except when quoting; avoid non-standard abbreviations).
8. Correct spelling.
9. Organization (chronological order).
10. Style (first person, active voice).

B. Incidents:

1. Domestic violence.
2. Property crime.
3. Crime against a person.

7.1.4 Identify examples of “fact” and “inference.”

7.1.5 Identify the following uses of field notes:

A. Serve as a basis for writing reports.

1. Reduce the need to re-contact parties involved.
2. Provide a greater degree of accuracy regarding times, statements and events (rather than memory alone).

B. May be used as evidence in court.

7.1.6 Identify the following characteristics of good field notes:

A. Accuracy.

B. Completeness.

C. Conciseness.

DATE FIRST PREPARED: June 1995

PREPARED BY: Laura Molinaro

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|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>REVIEWED</b> – REVISED:  | Laura Molinaro       | DATE: September 1997 |
| REVIEWED – <b>REVISED</b> : | SME Committee        | DATE: August 2001    |
| REVIEWED – <b>REVISED</b> : | AZ POST (Word)       | DATE: March 2003     |
| <b>REVIEWED</b> – REVISED:  | Lt. Dave Kelly, ALEA | DATE: August 2009    |
| REVIEWED – <b>REVISED</b> : | AZPOST (DocX)        | DATE: December 2021  |
| REVIEWED – <b>REVISED</b> : | AZPOST (Module req)  | DATE: July 2023      |
| AZ POST – APPROVAL:         | Richard Watling      | DATE: April 2010     |
| AZ POST – APPROVAL:         | Lori Wait            | DATE: January 2022   |
| AZ POST – APPROVAL:         | Lori Wait            | DATE: July 2023      |

INSTRUCTOR REFERENCES: Competency-based core curriculum, writing police reports by Rose Report Writing Manual by ALETA and ACIJIS/NCIC database availability by L. Allman.

CLASS LEVEL: Student

TRAINING AIDS: Transparencies, overheads/projector, PowerPoint, and videos/VCR.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY: Interactive lecture, class discussion and demonstration.

SUCCESS CRITERIA: 70% or above on a written, multiple-choice examination.  
Pass/fail on demonstration requirements.

COMPUTER FILE NAME: 7.1 Report Writing

DATE RELEASED TO THE SHARE FILE: August 2023

**I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Instructor – (self) introduction.
- B. Preview of performance objectives.
- C. Required materials (legible copies from your agencies).
  - 1. MOR face sheets (Miscellaneous Offense Report).
  - 2. Continuation sheets.
  - 3. Citation forms.
  - 4. Written warning forms.
  - 5. Repair order forms.
  - 6. Lined paper for memorandums.
  - 7. Booking sheets/part “A.”
  - 8. Juvenile referral form.
  - 9. DUI report.
  - 10. Traffic accident report.
- D. As a requirement of the 2024 Module system, a series of graded reports is required. One graded report is mandatory for Module I, two graded reports are mandatory for Module II, and three graded reports are mandatory for Module III. Academies have their own discretion on where and what scenarios they elect to utilize for the reports.

**II. POLICE REPORTS****P. O. 7.1.1**

- A. Definition: Written documents containing factual information about a specific event or series of events.
- B. Types:
  - 1. Administrative reports.
  - 2. Those reports generated within a police agency.
  - 3. Operational reports.

4. Those reports generated by a police agency to report a crime or incident in which there may be further follow up or whenever there is the possibility for a delayed request for prosecution.

**III. USES OF A POLICE REPORT****P. O. 7.1.2**

A. Document criminal and traffic activity.

B. Provide information to follow-up officers.

**P. O. 7.1.2B**

C. Provide a permanent record of the facts of an incident.

**P. O. 7.1.2A**

1. Court proceedings.

2. Investigations.

3. Incident references.

D. Compile statistics used for:

**P. O. 7.1.2D**

1. Uniform Crime Reports (UCR's).

2. Manpower allocations (shift activity).

3. Identifying crime trends (crime reports).

4. Determining budget needs.

E. Gathering and disseminating intelligence within the criminal justice system.

F. Reports as to clarity, completeness and accuracy also serves as an evaluation tool regarding officer performance.

**P. O. 7.1.2C****IV. MEMORANDUMS**

A. Brief, informal messages that often substitute for a formal letter.

B. Usually used when informal personal relationships exist, but may also be used for more formal communications.

1. Quite often used for interoffice communications.

2. Also used for inter-departmental or interdepartmental communication.

- C. Can be used to communicate a piece of information or to state a position on an issue.
  - 1. Clarity is the main concern of the informative memorandum.
  - 2. A statement of the problem and its solution is the main concern of a persuasive memorandum.
  
- D. May be written on departmental forms.
  - 1. Use proper titles.
  - 2. Begin by stating your main point.
  - 3. Explain as logically as you can why it is as you have stated.
  - 4. It is acceptable to number your supporting points or to use a bullet format.
  - 5. If you have good arguments to refute the opposing points of view, often it is wise to present these “alternatives” and then show why you believe they are acceptable.
  - 6. Whenever possible, use figures to quantify your arguments.
  - 7. Begin with the weakest arguments and conclude with the strongest.
  - 8. It is a good idea to “sound out” your supervisor on his/her views on the matter and suggest your point of view.
  - 9. Be specific and concise.
  - 10. Avoid generalization and jargon.
  
- E. As always, correct usage of the English language is necessary.
  
- F. Facts versus an inference. **P. O. 7.1.4**
  - 1. Facts are a thing or occurrence that is known or can be proven to be true.
    - a. Based on evidence.
  - 2. An inference is an opinion or a conclusion. Inferences are steps in reasoning, moving from premise to a logical consequence. This is not always based on the totality of facts.
    - a. Based on analysis, derived from reason to fill in missing information.

## V. CONTENTS OF A REPORT – REPORTS MUST ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

## A. Who?

1. Who is the victim, suspect, witness, officer, etc?
2. Descriptions of a person must be complete and accurate.
  - a. Complete and correct name, spelled accurately.
  - b. Do not rely on past information, get it each and every time you contact someone.  
**INSTRUCTOR NOTE:** *Officers often have multiple contacts with the same person(s).*
  - c. Nationality or origin.
  - d. Age, date of birth, SSN if available.
  - e. Physical description, including identifying marks.
  - f. Do not rely only on driver's license information.
  - g. Aliases (A.K.A.'s) and nicknames, street names, gang names and affiliation.
  - h. Exact home address, including apartment number, motel room number or trailer park space number. Is the mailing address different from the physical address? Get both. Get a telephone number, message number and/or pager number and cell phone number.
  - i. Occupation, exact business name, address and telephone number. Just because a person is unemployed does not necessarily mean they are without an occupation.
  - j. Any other relevant information that will help to answer "who?"
3. Investigative leads (IL's) are persons who may have knowledge of the crime or who may be able to provide additional information.
4. Evidence, at this time, is sufficient to list them as suspects. Listing a person as a suspect will be based on some type of evidence, if indexed by the information.

## B. What?

1. Property attached and/or destroyed (describe).
2. Property stolen – give accurate and complete description.

3. All lost, missing or stolen property will be itemized and described completely to include:
    - a. Brand names.
    - b. Size.
    - c. Color.
    - d. Serial number.
    - e. Model number.
    - f. Operation identification markings.
    - g. Damage.
    - h. Any other identifying marks or characteristics.
  4. Offense committed.
  5. Vehicle used in crime to include type, model, color and other information necessary for a full description.
  6. Evidence.
- C. Why?
1. Do not use personal opinion to answer this question.
  2. There may be times when this cannot be answered.
- D. When?
1. Date and time. Be as accurate as possible.
    - a. Victims may need assistance in developing a “window of time” for the offense.
    - b. Utilize whatever means possible to assist, specific dates such as holidays or birthdays, seasons, etc., to develop the “window of time.”
  2. Weather conditions, if applicable.
- E. Where?
1. Where did the offense occur; where was the offense committed?



2. From where was the property stolen? Be specific.
  3. Where was the property found? Be specific.
  4. Where was the evidence found? Be specific.
- F. How?
1. Method used to commit the offense.
  2. NOTE: In answering these basic questions, if the reporting officer is an effective report writer, the elements of the offense being investigated will have been recorded.

## **VI. FORM TO BE USED FOR WRITTEN REPORTS**

- A. Synopsis.
1. A brief paragraph that tells the reader what the report is about.
  2. Answer briefly the questions – who, what, why, when, where and how.
- B. Body.
1. The main portion of the report.
  2. A detailed description of what the officer saw, heard and did.
  3. A simple and direct telling of what happened, written in the first person narrative.
  4. Written in chronological order.
  5. Answers who, what, why, when, where and how (if possible).
  6. Includes the elements of the crime.
  7. Do not use police jargon or profanity.
  8. If a suspect, victim or witness uses profanity and it is being included in the report, be sure to indicate that this is a direct quote.
- C. Conclusion.
1. A brief ending.
  2. Ties up all loose ends.

3. Informs the reader.
4. Indicates if the case has been turned over to another agency or department and provides the name and badge number of an individual to whom responsibility for the case was given.
5. Whether or not the case was closed.
6. If any follow up is needed or planned.

**VII. STEPS IN WRITING A REPORT (G.R.O.W.E.) ( Gather facts, Record facts, Organize facts, Write report, Evaluate report)**

**A. Gather the facts.**

1. Begin to assemble the information as soon as you are certain of the subject matter.
2. Investigate, interview and interrogate.
3. Conduct a proper inquiry with a thorough examination of all relevant information.

**B. Record the facts.**

1. Take notes immediately.
2. Be sure that notes are accurate and complete.

**C. Organize the facts.**

1. Arrange and organize notes in a logical manner.
2. An outline is a good way to do this.
  - a. A device to ensure good organization of thought.
  - b. It need not be extensive and can be used for most narrative types of reports.
  - c. Makes the job of writing the report easier.
  - d. Helps the writer analyze and organize the findings of an inquiry.
  - e. Forces the writer to decide on the important ideas to be communicated and to consider the best order for presentation.

- f. Each major point of the outline becomes a paragraph permitting the writer to develop one (1) idea at a time.
- g. Each secondary point becomes the “meat” of the paragraph and fills in details of the paragraph.

D. Write the report.

1. Communicate all relevant finds to an adequate written report.
2. Write for the reader. (Do not assume the reader knows anything about your report or the situations you are writing about.)
3. The task is not only to express ideas, but also to make an impression on the mind of the reader.
4. Reports should be written as though the writer is speaking face-to-face with the reader.
5. Put words together in sentences that are easy to understand.
6. Do not try to overwhelm the reader, just communicate the information in writing in the simplest and most direct manner possible.
7. Reports are meaningless unless the reader is informed, gains an understanding of a situation or is moved into action.

E. Evaluate the report.

1. Edit, proofread and revise, when necessary.
2. Read the report aloud to hear how it sounds.
3. Answer the following questions:
  - a. Is the report based on facts?
  - b. Is the reasoning sound?
  - c. Does the report contain sufficient information?
  - d. Do the facts need interpretation?
  - e. Has too much material been included?
  - f. Are the sources of information the best available?

- g. Is the subject stated clearly?
  - h. Are spelling, capitalization and punctuation correct?
  - i. Is the report written in standard English?
  - j. Is the writing legible and easily read?
- 4. If the report is sloppy or incorrect, it will be ineffective.
  - 5. Form and content are integrally related – one (1) affects the other.

**VIII. NOTE TAKING****P. O. 7.1.5****A. Purpose and value.**

- 1. The first step in writing a report. **P. O. 7.1.5A**
  - a. Aids in the investigation of a crime or incident.
  - b. Aids in writing the report.
- 2. Definition of a note.
  - a. A condensed or informal record.
  - b. A brief comment or explanation.
  - c. A brief memorandum to assist the memory.
  - d. A brief comment that will recall to memory.
- 3. An officer's notes are one of the most important tools in law enforcement.
  - a. Much of the efficiency of a police department is based on information from the general public.
  - b. There must be a written record of the information for it to be of value.
  - c. The first place the information is recorded is in the officer's notes.
  - d. Notes must be extensive enough to:
    - i. Retain information obtained through inquiry and investigation in complete and accurate detail.

- ii. Allow the preparation of complete and accurate reports.
  - iii. Help recall for testifying in court.
  - iv. Serve as a reference for some of the police activities performed on a particular day.
  - e. Complete and accurate notes are essential because they will become the source of the content of the written report.
  - f. If an officer fails to record information accurately and completely, the content of his/her written report is likely to be inaccurate, incomplete or both.
- B. The note taking process.
1. Good notes have many of the same characteristics as a good report.
    - a. Clear – write down exactly what you want to remember, say what you mean to say.
    - b. Complete – do not overlook details.
    - c. Concise – do not use 10 words if five (5) will tell the whole story.
    - d. Accurate – record all the facts exactly as they become known.
    - e. Objective – omit your personal opinions.
  2. Conduct a proper inquiry with a thorough examination of all relevant information.
  3. Some sources of information used in an investigation are:
    - a. Personal observations.
    - b. Interviews.
    - c. Records searches.
    - d. Surveillance.
    - e. Past reports.
  4. Record all relevant information legibly and in black ink.
    - a. Take notes of pertinent details while you are conducting your investigation.

- b. Develop the habit of recording facts as they are learned and as evidence is obtained.
  - i. Waiting for even a few minutes can result in the omission of important details.
  - ii. Do not write down everything that is said, but do write down anything that might be of importance.
  - iii. Use exact quotes when they are necessary.
  - iv. When in doubt, write it down.
  - v. Notes should include – who, what, why, when, where and how.
  
- C. Accuracy requires that:
  - 1. All spelling, numbers, dates and times are verified as they are recorded – repeat them aloud.
  - 2. The officer should obtain valid identification from all individuals.
  - 3. The officer should record all identifying information:
    - a. Full name.
    - b. Sex.
    - c. Age.
    - d. Race.
    - e. Home address.
    - f. Home telephone number.
    - g. Occupation.
    - h. Business address.
    - i. Business telephone number.
    - j. Pager number.
    - k. Message telephone number.

4. Use freehand sketches and diagrams, if necessary.
5. Use a notebook, not scraps of paper.
  - a. The notebook should contain the officer's name and badge number so that it can be returned if lost.
  - b. At the start of each new investigation, write down the case number and date/time.
  - c. Many agencies issue the type of notebook they want used by officers.
  - d. The final report should be thorough and complete enough for use as evidence in court. Study your notes and final report before going to court.

**P. O. 7.1.5B****D. Outlines.**

1. Most organized method of taking notes.
2. Consist of general topics with more specific information (sub-topics) indented and listed below.
3. Diagrams which place your information in order and indicate the importance and relationship of each piece of information.
4. Become the skeleton for your reports.

**IX. CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-WRITTEN REPORT****P. O. 7.1.6****A. Factual.**

1. The basic purpose of any police operational report is to record the facts and communicate information.
2. Does not contain your personal opinions.
  - a. Hurts your credibility.
  - b. Makes it difficult to proceed further in prosecution and investigation.

**B. Accurate.****P. O. 7.1.6A**

1. To be useful, facts must be accurate.
2. A well-written report is specific and detailed.

- C. Objective.
1. Non-opinionated, fair and impartial.
  2. Objectivity is attained by keeping to the facts.
  3. Objectivity is attained by using words with non-emotional overtones.
    - a. Be aware of the effect of words that are used.
    - b. Some words have little emotional affect (i.e., “cried”).
    - c. Some words have emotional effects, positive or negative overtones, (i.e., “blubbered”).
- D. Complete. **P. O. 7.1.6B**
1. An effective report contains answers to the basic investigative questions: Who, what, why, when, where and how.
- E. Concise. **P. O. 7.1.6C**
1. A report should be brief enough to be useful, but long enough to cover all pertinent information.
  2. A report that is too long will be difficult to read and understand.
    - a. Do not confuse the length of a report with the quality of a report.
    - b. Use as few words as possible to record the necessary facts, but do not use so few words that the necessary facts are omitted.
    - c. Simple, direct and straightforward sentences use fewer words.
- F. Clear.
1. Language of the report must be simple and to the point.
  2. Facts should follow a logical sequence usually in chronological order, the order in which they happened.
  3. Always write in the first person narrative.
  4. Say exactly what you mean; there should be no chance of more than one (1) interpretation of the report.



5. Use specific and concrete facts and details.
6. Descriptive words and phrases must be as close to the events they describe as possible.
7. Use diagrams and sketches when a description is complex.
8. Do not use abbreviations which are not commonly known.
9. Do not use police jargon, codes or abbreviations.
10. Use short sentences, well organized into short paragraphs.

G. Mechanically correct.

1. All rules of correct spelling, grammar, punctuation and sentence structure apply.
2. Good writing depends on the mastery of the language.
  - a. Proper word usage enhances the quality of reports.
  - b. Use a dictionary to check spelling, meanings of words and to enlarge the use of synonyms.
  - c. Read widely to increase your command of the language.

H. Legible.

1. Reports must be easily read by others.
2. Reports that cannot be read, are of little use to anyone.
3. Reports should be dated and written as soon as possible after completion of the necessary investigative work.

**X. FORMAT FOR WRITTEN REPORTS**

A. Pre-synopsis.

1. Titles, important facts and information about the Departmental Report (DR).
  - a. Additional victims, suspects, witnesses and investigative leads.
  - b. Weapons.
  - c. Injuries.

- d. Point of entry.
  - e. Property taken was destroyed, recovered.
  - f. Evidence.
  - g. Additional vehicles.
- 2. Other titles may be used, if applicable.
- B. Synopsis.
- 1. A brief paragraph that tells the reader what the report is about.
  - 2. Answers who, what, why, when, where and how.
- C. Body.
- 1. The main portion of the report.
  - 2. Detailed description of what the officer said, heard and did.
  - 3. Written in the first person narrative.
  - 4. Fully describes who, what, why, when, where and how.
  - 5. Opinions of witnesses and other persons may be recorded, but the officer should clearly indicate what is opinion and what is hearsay and distinguish it from fact.
  - 6. Use quotes for unusual phrases, profanity.
- D. Conclusion.
- 1. A brief ending or summary, if the investigation is complex.
  - 2. If the case has been turned over to another agency or department, provide the name and badge number of the individual to whom responsibility for the case was given.
  - 3. State whether the case is closed, the investigation continues, is unfounded, etc.

**XI. CONCLUSION – LECTURE PORTION**

- A. Review of performance objectives.
- B. Final questions and answers.

- C. Instructor closing comment(s).

**XII. DEMONSTRATION/PRACTICAL EXERCISES****P. O. 7.1.3**

- A. Given written, verbal or visual descriptions of the types of incidents listed below, record clear and accurate notes and write a report demonstrating the following:
- B. Essential characteristics.
  - 1. Accuracy.
  - 2. Conciseness.
  - 3. Completeness (who, what, why, when, where and how).
  - 4. Clarity.
  - 5. Legibility.
  - 6. Objectivity.
  - 7. Proper grammar (avoid slang and jargon, except when quoting; avoid non-standard abbreviations).
  - 8. Correct spelling.
  - 9. Organization (chronological order).
  - 10. Style (first person, active voice).
- C. Incidents:
  - 1. Domestic violence.
  - 2. Property crime.
  - 3. Crime against a person.