Law Enforcement Report Writing
Content Guideline

In the police context, report writing is the main way for:

- Communicating;
- retrieving information; and
- ensuring accountability for observations and/or actions.

Report writing is a means of communication through which events or incidents are made known and/or recorded: crucial for information sharing, decision-making and monitoring progress of activities

Contents and Style of Report:

- Personal Data
- Report Data (5 Ws and H)
- Writing Principles (accurate, brief, complete, clear, objective and well formatted)
- Writing Style (abbreviations, dates, time, names of places and numbers)

1. **Personal Data** are the identification of all persons involved, including:
   - Name of police officer and number
   - Surname / Last Name / Family Name (also Maiden Name)
   - First Name / Forename / Given Name
   - Date and Place of Birth (DOB)
   - Status: single–married–divorced–widowed–separated
   - Nationality / Ethnicity / Country / Citizenship
   - ID Card (Type and Number)
   - Residence / Address / Mailing Address
   - Telephone / Mobile Phone
   - Occupation / Profession / Job
   - Father's name (Surname and First name)
   - Mother's name
   - Address (Street, Village, Town, Country)

2. **Report Data** are the summary of all important facts and details. There are some guiding questions which should be answered in a report. The following list is not all-inclusive.

   - **WHEN**:
     - did you receive the information? (date and time)
     - did you contact the involved parties?
     - did the incident happen?
     - did you arrive on the scene?
   - **WHERE**:
     - did the incident occur (location/address)?

- **WHO**:
    - called the police?
    - said what?
    - committed the crime/witnesses?
    - did you speak to?
    - did what?

- **WHAT**:
    - happened (incident/accident/crime) ?
    - action did the police take?
    - role did each person play?
    - crime (if any) was committed?

- **WHY**:
    - did the police take the action they did?
    - did people take particular actions they did?
    - did the incident / crime occur?

- **HOW**:
    - did the incident/crime occur?

Writing Principles of a Police Report

The contents of a report must reflect the specific event or incident. There should be no confusion or doubt on the part of the reader about the contents of the report. If the information in the report is not clear, it is of little use. There are six principles associated with a good report:

1. **Accurate:** Use clear, specific and precise language. Make sure the facts are clear to you before you describe them in a report. Do not confuse facts with hearsay or opinions.

2. **Brief:** A report must be short and concise, but long enough to cover all the essentials. Avoid irrelevant information. Add details only when it is necessary. A brief and well-written report is more effective than a long extended report.

3. **Complete:** Partial facts can create a wrong picture. A good report should include all the relevant facts in order to lead to a logical conclusion.

4. **Clear:** Make it simple and avoid ambiguity in the report in order to convey the intended message. All reports should be worded carefully so that the information is clear to the reader. Facts should be presented in a chronological order.

5. **Objective:** Keep the report objective and unbiased by stating the facts as they are without adding personal opinions. Report all facts, even if they are advantageous to the defendant.

6. **Well formatted:** The format of a report is relatively simple. Begin with the personal data, then the report data and finally the conclusion. The information in the report has to be in a chronological order so that they reflect the sequence of the events/incidents.

Law Enforcement Report Writing
Basic Writing Rules

ABBREVIATIONS

Unusual abbreviations or acronyms should be spelled out fully the first time that they are used in a document

Use USA, not US, as an adjective describing the United States. This is because reports are sometimes telexed in upper-case and the noun "us" can be confused with the adjective "US" in the upper-case.

Abbreviations for reports should be in upper-case, e.g. CSDP, EU, NATO, SITREP, SOP, VIP, OSCE, UNODC.

Should you come across any abbreviations which are unknown, check back with the originator and follow the rule mentioned above when you report.

CAPITALISATION

Capitalisation of words in English is never easy. Proper names are almost always capitalized, along with titles when they are attached to names.

Example: President C......

The titles of organizations are also capitalized. Example: ....the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

But a generic description of something is rarely capitalized. Example: The presidents of the parties will meet tomorrow.

Note that when a title is used to signify a specific individual, it should be capitalized.

Example: President J... is visiting the EU. The President will speak on 22 March.

Government is almost always capitalized, even when used generally.

DATES

Dates should follow the format: Day / Month / Year. Example: 22 March 2014.

In reports, correspondence or emails, to avoid confusion do not use "today" or "yesterday", use dates instead. All dates should be written in full, i.e. 2 November.

When in doubt, begin the report statement with the date of the event. Example: On 13 April.......

One need not insert the year unless the event is related to another year. Example: All EU police officers will depart by 31March 2015.

FORMAT

Reports may carry a header and footer with a Security Classification.

Maps or diagrams used to illustrate a particular point are to be included in the report, if technical means for the layout and the communication of the report are available.

When writing the reports, take care to leave the correct spaces after punctuation marks: After a full stop (.) or colon (:) leave two spaces. After a comma (,) or semi colon (;) leave one space. This makes the document easier to read.

GRAMMAR

Two equal phrases in one sentence require a semi-colon (;). Example: They fired; we fired back.

The three word rule: Any prepositional phrase at the beginning of a sentence with three or more words in it, e.g. "In the winter", must have a comma after it.

Adverbs, such as "reportedly" or "recently", should come close to the verb to which they relate. Rarely should they begin a sentence.

Media is a plural noun and is therefore followed by the plural form of a verb when media is used as a subject. Example: The media report that......

When describing police, avoid using just the title of the forces or unit. Write: "The Riot Police arrested the suspect" or "Riot Police arrested the suspect".

MEDIA

Media reports should be accredited at the end of the sentence or paragraph with the source in brackets, i.e. (AFP), (ITN) or (REUTER) etc.

When using media reports always indicate the source, e.g. "The media report that...." If it is not clear how reliable the media report may be, use phrases such as "UNITA-controlled media sources claim that...."

NAMES AND PLACES

Always use the person's title or Mr. or Ms. Example: Mr. C...., Minister of the Interior Dr. B...., Lt Col D.... etc.

As a general rule, say "the Federal Government of GERMANY" or "the State Government of NORTH RHINE WESTPHALIA" (note the capitalisation.) This avoids confusion since there can be many governments at various levels in a country.

If a place or region is not internationally recognized, put the name in quotation marks when describing it. Example: "ABKHAZIA" or the "ABKHAZIAN Defence Minister".

All place names should be typed in capital letters, e.g. TUZLA, SUKHUMI etc.

When a geographical expression is part of a name, it should be capitalised.

Example: Sector East, State of CALIFORNIA, NEW YORK CITY.

When referring to a place name that is not on the map, indicate its distance and direction from a marked place name.

NUMBERS

The numbers from one to ten are usually spelled out in full, e.g. seven. Those above ten are usually expressed as figures, e.g. 11.

There are exceptions, e.g. "between seven and eleven", or "the 4th Brigade", or "7 November".

Avoid having a number which is expressed as a figure as the first word in a sentence. Example: Eight offenders were observed.

SEQUENCING

If incidents are referred to by date, ensure that they are put down in the correct sequence, i.e. "On 21 December, a meeting took place between...... On 23 December, three vehicles…

SPELLING

Be aware of the differences between International English (British spelling as described in the Concise Oxford Dictionary) and US English (which is a regional dialect).

Common spelling problems:

Cease-fire, peace-keeping, and machine-gun are always hyphenated when they are used as nouns. Middle East is not hyphenated.

Small arms is always plural and is two words.

Logistics as a noun is always in the plural.

"It's" is an abbreviation in English for "it is". The possessive "its" has no apostrophe.

STYLE

Ensure that correct titles are used for individuals, Sgt., Capt. DCI, Supt., Dr., Rev. etc.