

# Report Writing and Note Taking

# 4

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Introduction .....	66
Note Taking .....	66
Purpose of Memo or Notebook .....	66
Specifications and Safekeeping .....	67
Rules for Taking Notes .....	68
What to Note .....	69
What's Important? .....	69
Report Writing .....	71
Distinguishing Facts, Inferences, and Opinions .....	72
Types of Factual Reports .....	73
Basic Principles of Effective Report Writing .....	77
Statement Taking .....	79
How to Take a Statement .....	79
Chapter Summary .....	81
Key Terms.....	82
Reference .....	82
Performance Application .....	82

When you have completed this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain the purposes of note taking and report writing by security personnel.
- Describe and distinguish different types of reports.
- Understand the legal implications of on-the-job reports.
- Describe the appropriate content of reports.

## Introduction

In this chapter we will examine the importance of record-keeping, note taking, and report writing. Appropriate methods for taking statements and the legalities surrounding admissibility of such evidence in a court proceeding will be discussed.

In the security industry, security professionals are the eyes and the ears of the client. As previously covered in Chapter 3, security professionals are trained to be observant and to identify deficiencies and security risks. Security guards must relay their findings to the client so that they can be dealt with, and comprehensive documentation is required to enable this information to be relayed accurately and in a timely manner.

People who think of security as an action-based job are often surprised by the amount of paperwork required. Working in security means documenting a wide range of occurrences, both routine and non-routine. Because of this, security professionals must develop strong communication skills, both verbal and written. They must be able to speak clearly and with enough detail for their instructions to be understood completely. They must be able to jot down notes and write reports that not only contain all information necessary to support informed decision-making, but that are also neat and easy to read.

Many security companies have transitioned into electronic record-keeping. Entering information gathered by security professionals into databases permits the information to be stored and organized efficiently, so that incident details can be retrieved quickly—for example, by using a keyword search. Note, however, that the use of electronic record storage demands that proper measures are taken to ensure the security of confidential information.

For the purpose of security operations, we will be discussing note taking and its importance when it is done at the time an incident occurs, and also report writing, which is the final document that is provided to the client for action (if required). The combination of adequate notes and a comprehensive report will paint a clear picture of what transpired and allow the client to take any necessary preventive measures to avoid reoccurrences.

## Note Taking

It is essential that detailed notes are made about observations either at the time or immediately afterward to later assist in information recall. Notes enable security professionals to write a comprehensive report and to refresh memories at a later date. Notes may often be found to contain clues and evidence that were not recognized as such at the time of the incident.

## Purpose of Memo or Notebook

A notebook is intended to serve as a chronological record of a security guard's activities while on duty. It represents his or her findings, observations made, and actions taken during each duty period. Sample entries in a security guard's notebook are shown in Figure 4.1 on page 68. The evidential integrity of the notebook requires that all matters—whether trivial or important—are recorded with the same level of accuracy and detail. A notebook is a security professional's lifeline. It serves the following purposes.

### Aide-Memoire

Because the significance of details may not become apparent until after an occurrence, appropriate notebook entries provide an essential written reference for later consultation—for example, when preparing for a court appearance months or even years after an incident took place.

## Background for Other Security Personnel and/or Police

Accurate and complete notebook entries allow other security personnel and/or police to pick up the investigation where the security guard left off without re-interviewing witnesses.

## Grounds for Action

Notebook entries can serve as support for a security guard's decisions. For example, certain actions, such as making an arrest, require that the guard had reasonable grounds to believe that an offence had been committed before the action was taken. Because actions, such as an arrest, will be scrutinized later, accurate notes help establish the appropriate grounds for the actions taken.

## Official Document

A security professional's notebook often becomes an exhibit—an official document—in any court case arising out of a security incident, and as such, may be examined by lawyers, judges, and a jury. With permission, notes can also be used to refresh your memory when testifying in court. It is almost certain that the court will inquire about when the notes were made and, unless the notes were made at the time or immediately after the incident, the court will usually not give consent for them to be examined. If permission is granted and notes are produced in court, the notebook will become part of the evidence. The notebook may then be examined by any of the parties involved.

## Performance Measurement and Employment Record

A security professional's notes are a measurement of his or her work performance, competency, efficiency, and character. The methods used to write and keep notes can lead to recommendations for promotion and specialized duties.

Notes also become a record of the guard's days off, sick days, overtime, and special duties, and can verify his or her salary and vacation time.

## Specifications and Safekeeping

Notebooks are generally issued by the employer. The typical notebook is hardbound and pocket-sized, with lined pages. Notebook pages are numbered to ensure continuity. Under no circumstances should pages be removed; doing so jeopardizes the integrity of the entire notebook.

Notebooks are considered the property of the organization, not the user. Notebooks are returned to storage at the end of a shift, and filled notebooks are placed in long-term storage for a minimum of seven years. Security guards are responsible for protecting their notebooks during a shift, which means keeping them in their possession for the entire shift. A security professional should have only one notebook in use at a time. Requests to review another guard's notebook are generally processed through the supervisor.

### ON THE JOB

It is important to remember that your notebook should never be used to record personal information. The information in your notebook may be used as evidence in a court case.

**Figure 4.1** Entries in a Security Guard's Notebook

	<i>Wednesday, September 13, 2017</i>	<b>1</b>
<i>0700</i>	<i>start shift. Walk around. Weather clear, cool.</i>	
<i>0730</i>	<i>Good visibility, roads dry. Call to attend warehouse B; motion detector triggered.</i>	
<i>0736</i>	<i>Arrive scene &amp; observe minor disarray, trashcan upturned, spillage of discarded coffee cups, paw prints, apparently raccoon tracks on linoleum. Scuffling sounds heard behind styrofoam sheets against east wall.</i>	
<i>0743</i>	<i>Raccoon located behind styrofoam sheet and chased out of warehouse. Inspection of premises revealed no other animals or humans present. Garbage cleared.</i>	
<i>0752</i>	<i>Return to control room, alarm reset.</i>	
<i>0756</i>	<i>False alarm report completed.</i>	

At the end of a shift, the supervisor reviews all notebooks. Any comments are made in red ink. Requests for corrections and additions are communicated promptly to the notebook's user, and the notebook is signed by the supervisor after his or her review.

Security personnel must be mindful of the fact that their notes, reports, and statements may contain private and confidential information. It is the security professional's responsibility to ensure the security of such sensitive information. This also applies to any electronic record-keeping or transmission of information.

If it becomes necessary to transmit information electronically to other individuals, the sensitivity of the information will need to be taken into account before choosing a method of transmission. For example, it may NOT be appropriate to transmit these records via email unless special precautions are taken, such as using encryption, or creating password-protected files, or some other security measure. In some settings, security professionals may be instructed to upload files into a secure database designed for the purpose, or onto cloud-based storage systems, placing them in folders to which only authorized individuals have access.

## Rules for Taking Notes

The standard notebook rules that should be abided by are as follows:

- The notebook should be a bound book with each page numbered.
- All entries should be made in chronological order, with the date and time recorded. The 24-hour clock should be used for recording time.

- Entries should be made as soon as possible after events are observed. All entries must be made in ink (preferably, black ink).
- Entries should be neat, legible, and concise.
- Note-takers should avoid the use of jargon and slang.
- There must be no erasures.
- Where an error is made, the incorrect word or words should be crossed out with a single line and the note taker should initial the changes.
- No pages must be removed.
- No words should be written between the lines.
- There should be no spaces left. Any space at the end of a line or page should be crossed through with a single line and initialed.

## What to Note

Security guards must report both routine and non-routine incidents.

Routine incidents reported may include:

- patrol observations (including “all clear”/“all’s well” observations);
- observations with respect to the state/condition of objects/equipment;
- observations with respect to things to watch out for—for example, potential hazards that may be developing (ice on walkways, etc.);
- observations with respect to human activities/normal traffic;
- false alarms and how they were handled; and
- anything else that security personnel have been instructed to observe.

Non-routine incidents may include:

- fires;
- bomb incidents;
- violence/assaults;
- thefts and intrusions;
- floods, lightning strikes, and other weather events;
- equipment malfunctions;
- trespass incidents;
- medical emergencies and workplace accidents;
- vandalism;
- protests/demonstrations/labour relations incidents; and
- information technology (IT) incidents.

## What’s Important?

In recording the details of an incident, it’s important to learn how to prioritize information and express it in a complete and organized way. Determining what information is most relevant is a skill that can be learned, just like any other. A tool that may help security professionals develop this skill is self-questioning—asking questions of themselves and answering them in their notes.

## WANTED

For example, if an object needs to be described, security professionals can determine what information is required by remembering the acronym “WANTED”:

<b>W</b>	What are you describing?
<b>A</b>	Appearance (colour, size, material)
<b>N</b>	Number (how many articles, pieces, serial number)
<b>T</b>	Type (make and model)
<b>E</b>	Extraordinary (are there any additional features that make it identifiable?)
<b>D</b>	Dollars (apparent value or worth)

## The Five Ws

Another common strategy for organizing information is to ask the “five W” questions: Who, What, Where, When, and Why, as well as How.

### 1. Who?

When describing a victim, suspect, or witness, and depending on the nature of the incident, a security guard might note:

- gender;
- age (ask for a birthdate; consider whether the age given seems plausible based on observation);
- height;
- weight;
- build;
- hair colour, texture, and style;
- facial hair;
- skin colour (be specific—is the person’s skin fair, light, brown, black, olive?) Are there scars or marks? Birthmarks? Tattoos?
- eye colour and whether glasses are worn;
- teeth (protruding, false, irregular, decayed);
- speech (refined, vulgar, foreign, lisp, rapid);
- physical deformities;
- mannerisms/peculiarities;
- a full description of clothing;
- a full description of articles carried (purse, briefcase, cellphone, packages, etc.).

### 2. What?

Record details of injuries or damage observed. Describe vehicles involved, if any. Make notes about any physical evidence secured, where and how it was marked, where it will be stored, and in whose possession it was placed.

### 3. Where?

In describing locations, provide a complete street address. Then, describe the specific location of the incident by reference to non-movable landmarks—for example, “4 metres to the west of the main entrance gate.” Be very specific. Note also the location of any evidence

## ON THE JOB

**Describing Vehicles**

When describing a vehicle, the following information should be recorded:

1. licence plate number, colour, province/state, year, and validation number;
2. year of manufacture and make;
3. body type and colour;
4. numbers: vehicle identification number (VIN) and engine number;
5. accessories: radio, CD player, navigation system, leather or fabric interior, etc.;
6. contents of car (trunk and passenger areas);
7. type of transmission, number of cylinders, size of engine;
8. odometer reading;
9. unusual details: damage, rust, dirt, stains, noise, smoke, dragging/dangling parts, stickers, and decorations; and
10. other basic information: owner's name, address, phone number, and driver's licence number.

collected—for example, “from the passenger-side floor of the silver Honda Accord, plate number ASKW 305.”

**4. When?**

The time of an incident should be as accurate as possible. If unknown, it may be estimated—for example, between 1330 and 1430 hours. Use the 24-hour clock to ensure that the time of day is never ambiguous.

The date recorded should include day, month, and year, and the day of the week. Note the weather conditions as well. Information such as light conditions, visibility, and the position of the sun and the presence of moonlight may be useful in screening witness testimony for investigations or may be useful in court later.

**5. Why?**

Include information regarding any actions or omissions that contributed to the incident. For example, were possessions left unattended or were keys left in a vehicle? Did a suspect use break-in tools? How do you know?

**6. How?**

When describing what has occurred, explain the events in chronological order. Note which information came from your own observations, and which information came from another person's description of the events.

## Report Writing

In dealing with security incidents, security guards must report the facts about what has happened. Reports are useful not only to the employer/client in reviewing what has happened, but they may also be used in a criminal case for prosecuting offenders or in a

civil lawsuit. In order to be useful, security reports must be clear and understandable to a wide range of different types of readers.

## Reporting Basics

To create a successful report, a security guard must have:

1. Complete knowledge of the facts surrounding every occurrence.
2. The intelligence to interpret the facts.
3. The discipline to identify facts from hearsay or outright falsehood for the reader.
4. The ability to express these facts in the report.

Security guards must record in their notebook all the information necessary to compile a complete report. To ensure that they have all possible information, every complaint received must be noted, regardless of its apparent importance or insignificance. Trivial matters may later become significant details in a police investigation. Most security organizations have report forms that cover practically every aspect of any occurrence.

## Distinguishing Facts, Inferences, and Opinions

While report writing often requires the security guard to make inferences from facts, excessive speculation and/or reliance on hearsay evidence may limit the usefulness of reports. Security guards must learn how to tell the difference between fact, inference, and opinion. They must also learn how to indicate secondary material, by making it clear, when using information from other sources, that the security guard is reporting what the person said, not vouching for the truth of the statement.

### Facts

Facts are information that security guards know for certain and that can be substantiated. Proof may consist of physical evidence, or of direct observation evidence—either the security guard's or that of a reliable witness.

A purely factual description of a break-and-enter scene might read something like this:

*The rear door was open. The lock was broken. A crowbar lay on the floor, and there was a set of footprints with toes pointing toward the interior of the building. The victim reported that various items were missing from different rooms.*

Facts answer six questions—Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?

### Inferences

Inferences are deductions or hypotheses of what probably happened based on the facts gathered by the security guard at the crime scene. Formulating a hypothesis is not the reader's function; it is the reporter's responsibility. And here, the reporter is the security guard, performing his or her duty.

To develop a hypothesis, security professionals must make statements about the unknown based on what they do know: in other words, inferences based on the facts or physical evidence, interviews, and investigative results. A security guard can be trained to observe and to think through each occurrence and, in doing so, write an impartial and logical account of what probably transpired.



Most of the time inferences will be correct. But security professionals must also recognize that they may be wrong. This is why it is crucial that they recognize that they are making an inference and not recording a fact. To make the difference clear to the reader, the writer must “tag” each inference as an inference to prevent misleading the reader.

To make an inference clear to the reader or to “tag” it, a security guard would write the following in an occurrence report (but not in a memo or notebook, where facts only are recorded):

*Based on the evidence gathered at the scene of the crime, including the fingerprints on the gun and the matching bullets, it appears that the victim was attacked by the accused.*

Note the tags: “based on the evidence” and “it appears.” Presenting an inference allows a security professional to examine new information that might come forward as the investigation continues.

## Opinions and Judgments

In addition to the facts, which must be included, and inferences, which may be included, a security professional has to know how to recognize opinions and judgments, which should never be included in written reports.

Opinions are personal beliefs or so-called gut-feeling reactions with no substantial evidential basis. This lack of solid factual support distinguishes opinions from inferences.

Judgments also have no place in security or police work. By judgments, we mean expressions of approval or disapproval. These judgments may occur in a blatant statement or more covertly in the slanting of information. For instance, a security guard who was aware that a witness’s statement was false might write: “Witness is a liar.” Such a declaration involves two assumptions: first, the witness knew the truth, and second, the witness deliberately misstated it. Neither assumption may be correct. Consequently, guards must refrain from using such open expressions of approval or disapproval. After all, to call a witness a liar is to imply that the witness consistently and deliberately gives false information.

Security professionals must also guard against using influential words that indicate approval or disapproval that may, as a consequence, affect the reader’s perception of the report. For instance, writing the opinion “the accused was personable and unlikely to commit such a horrible crime” would reflect unprofessional and inappropriate judgment.

Descriptors that have a negative connotation, for example, “squeegee kid” or “bag lady,” are to be avoided, because they imply judgment.

Even apparently harmless adverbs may reflect a judgment. Suppose a security guard wrote, “The complainant lamely stated, ‘I thought I had locked the door.’” The adverb “lamely” implies that the guard questions the validity of the statement or finds it inadequate; either way, it reflects disapproval. The guard unintentionally influenced the reader’s perception of the incident.

## Types of Factual Reports

There are four types of factual reports: general occurrence reports (initial reports), form reports, specialized reports, and supplemental reports. The type of report to be used is based on the type of investigation to be carried out.

**general occurrence report**

a report describing the preliminary investigation of an incident by the security professional who was the first to encounter it

## General Occurrence Reports (Initial Reports)

The **general occurrence report** covers the preliminary investigation of an incident and is prepared by the security guard who was the first to encounter the incident. Examples include arrest reports and security reports. A general occurrence report contains all or most of the following information:

- type of crime or incident (classified);
- date, time, and location;
- names, addresses, postal code, telephone numbers of all involved;
- details of conversations with persons involved (witnesses, suspects, complainants, and victims);
- detailed descriptions of persons, vehicles, property, and locations; and
- statements of all facts relevant to the case and inferences related to the facts (that is, the security professional's hypothesis).

### *Advantages of the General Occurrence Report*

The report is prepared in a narrative format, and it is freeform, continuous, and does not follow a prescribed pattern or outline. The focus is on a written account of the incident in chronological order.

### *Disadvantages of the General Occurrence Report*

The report is often too long and confusing, difficult to read, and time consuming to write.

## Form Reports

**form report**

a report template that includes blank spaces and/or check boxes and that provides for the standardized entry of essential data relating to specific incidents

The **form report** is designed to cover essential data relating to specific crimes or events. It is used where standardization of essential information is necessary, and it consists mainly of blank spaces and/or check boxes. Traffic reports (see Figure 4.2), missing-person reports, stolen bicycle or vehicle reports, and security violation reports are examples of the form report.

### *Advantages of the Form Report*

Form reports are quick and easy to fill in. They also reduce the danger of overlooking essential data.

### *Disadvantages of the Form Report*

The form is restrictive. No two cases are the same. As a result, variations in detail or complexity cannot be expressed fully.

## Specialized Reports

**specialized report**

a report used for complex and detailed investigations or for non-routine matters

**Specialized reports** are used for complex and detailed investigations and other non-routine matters. The format is generally flexible and centres on the story. Examples of specialized reports include court (Crown) briefs, private investigation reports, and security surveys.

### *Advantages of Specialized Reports*

A specialized report can fit any type of case. It is flexible and allows for a more detailed document with full and complete information.

## Disadvantages of Specialized Reports

Like the general occurrence report, it can be too long and confusing for the reader. The narrative form also makes it difficult and time consuming to pull out statistics.

**Figure 4.2** Traffic Report

Insurer		Agent or Broker		Claim No.	
<b>POLICY HOLDER</b>					
Name of Insured				Policy Number	
Residence Phone (    )			Business Phone (    )		
Home address				Postal Code	
Business address				Postal Code	
<b>VEHICLE</b>					
Registered owner			Address		
Actual owner			Address		
Make of vehicle	Year	Model	Serial No.	Plate No. & Province	
Mileage	Describe damage			\$ Estimate of damage	
<b>DRIVER</b>					
Name of driver		Age	State any physical disabilities		How long driving?
Home address			Business address		
Residence phone (    )		Business phone (    )		Driver's licence no.	
Previous accidents or convictions			Date of accident: day/mt/yr		
Time <input type="checkbox"/> A.M. <input type="checkbox"/> P.M.		Lighting conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Daylight <input type="checkbox"/> Dusk <input type="checkbox"/> Dark		Location of accident	
Purpose vehicle used for at time of accident			Weather conditions		Road conditions
Your speed		Direction		Other vehicle's speed	
				Direction	
Police investigation by			Charges		
Had you taken any alcohol or drugs prior to the accident			Who was responsible? (State reason)		

Figure 4.2 Continued

DAMAGE TO PROPERTY OF OTHERS								
Name		Phone No.		Name		Phone No.		
Address				Address				
Year and make of vehicle		Licence No.		Year and make of vehicle		Licence No.		
Name of insurer		Policy No.		Name of insurer		Policy No.		
Description of damage				Description of damage				
Where vehicle can be inspected				Where vehicle can be inspected				
Name of driver		Phone No.		Name of driver		Phone No.		
Address				Address				
DETAILS OF PERSONS INJURED								
Name	Age	Address		Phone No.	Nature of injuries	Hospital		
DETAILS OF WITNESSES								
	Witness No. 1		Witness No. 2		Witness No. 3			
Name								
Address								
In which Vehicle?	<input type="checkbox"/> In your car?	<input type="checkbox"/> Car No. 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Car No. 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> In your car?	<input type="checkbox"/> Car No. 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Car No. 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

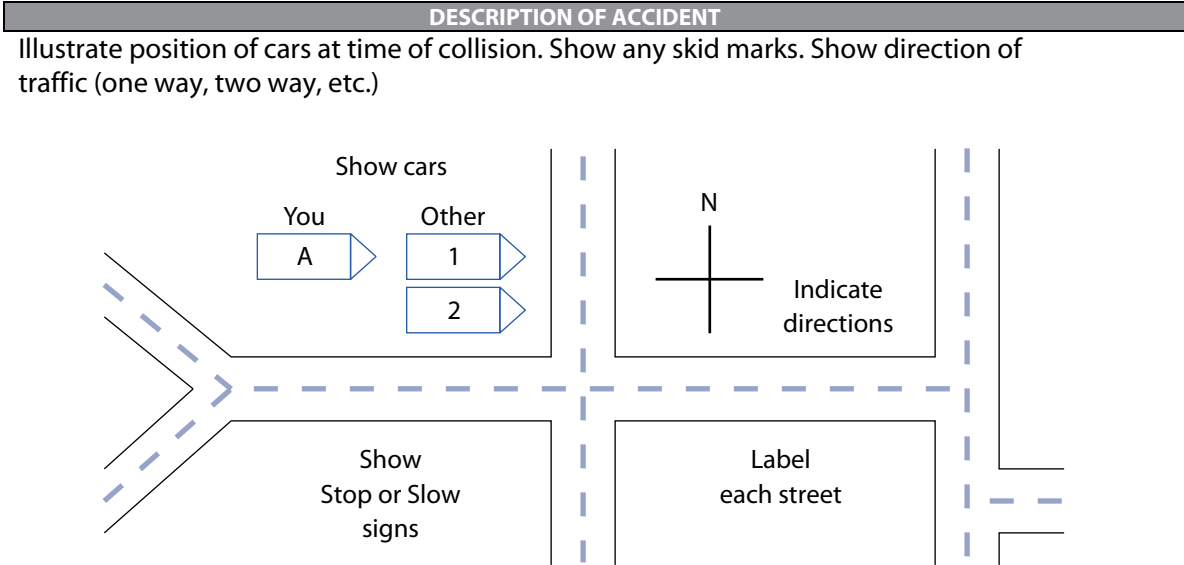
## Supplemental Reports

**supplemental report** a report added at a later time to a general occurrence report by, for example, other personnel assisting in the investigation

**Supplemental reports** are a continuation or addition to the general occurrence report and the specialized report. A supplemental report may be submitted by:

- the person originally assigned to the case;
- personnel assisting in the investigation; and
- specialists, such as identification officers and youth bureau investigators.

Figure 4.2 Continued




TO BE COMPLETED BY POLICYHOLDER	
Who is the principal driver of your vehicle?	What is that driver's relationship to you?
Was the vehicle being used with your consent?	Vehicle leased from?    Lien against vehicle by?
Signature of policyholder	Date: day/month/year

## Basic Principles of Effective Report Writing

A security report is any documentation that is recorded on a departmental form or other approved medium (for example, a computer disk) and maintained as a permanent record. The goal of report writing is to recreate an occurrence or observation in its entirety and to eliminate confusion and loss of relevant information. Despite wide-ranging differences between the types of reports, the following general principles can be applied to write an effective report:

- Assume the reader has absolutely no knowledge of the occurrence, the people involved, or the location of the incident. Inform the reader of all details, whether major or minor.

- Assume that there will be no opportunity to communicate verbally to the reader in order to clarify information. This will prevent vagueness and complacency in relating details.
- When describing an event or observation, avoid using general terms such as assault, theft, robbed, or damaged. Instead, describe the event fully so that the reader can create a mental image and conclude that an assault took place.

*Bill clenched his right fist and walked toward Helen. He raised his fist and struck Helen's chin.*

- Avoid paraphrasing. Paraphrasing means condensing an observation to a minimal explanation. It lacks specific details and causes the reader to ask questions about the incident. An example of paraphrasing is, "Ralph saw Bill hit Helen." From this sort of statement, the reader would have several outstanding questions: Where was Ralph when he made the observations? Where was Bill? How exactly did Bill hit Helen? What were the relationships between these three people?
- All conversations, statements, and responses made by victims, suspects, or accused persons, and all witness statements (this includes any investigating, assisting, and specialized security personnel) should be recorded verbatim.
- Physical evidence must be described in detail. Draw on your five senses and encourage witnesses to draw on theirs to recreate an image of the scene. Include the location in which the evidence was found and who had the chain of possession over the item.
- Use simple words to eliminate the need to explain further in explanatory phrases.
- Avoid grammatical and spelling errors.
- Avoid verbal diarrhea. Say it once in as few words as possible.
- Keep sentence length to no more than 15 to 18 words.
- Consider reader fatigue. Leave margins, use headings, and use a paragraph form, otherwise, readers will lose interest and will have trouble maintaining concentration.
- Before starting to write, collect the facts and assess and interpret their significance to the incident.
- Always use first person (the "I" voice) in the report.
- Note the condition and characteristics of the witnesses, suspects, and the accused. For example, are they intoxicated? Agitated? Do they have vision limitations? Write down everything that is relevant to the credibility of a witness.
- Include conclusions or inferences and recommendations in the report.
- Always reread the report for any mistakes in spelling or grammar and any omissions.

## ON THE JOB

Remember the five Cs of good report writing: Clear, Concise, Complete, Correct, Chronological order.

# Statement Taking

Taking statements from witnesses is an important part of any field investigation, because the responding security guard is gathering information from bystanders, anyone impacted by the incident, and/or person(s) responsible. While investigations will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 14, the following is a basic guide to the types of statements that may be recorded by security personnel.

## Victim Statements

Security professionals need to be mindful of the fact that victims have experienced a trauma and might not be emotionally stable immediately after the incident. In such instances, it might be wise to postpone the taking of a **victim statement** to a later time when the victim has had time to recover. A victim's condition must be our number one concern.

### victim statement

a written account or the transcript of a verbal account of an incident in the victim's words and from the victim's perspective

## Witness Statements

In cases where someone saw the incident occur, it is crucial to obtain a **witness statement** because witnesses could be the only persons who know what happened and their statements might play a vital role in identifying those responsible and in establishing what has happened.

### witness statement

a written account or the transcript of a verbal account of an incident in the words of and from the perspective of an individual who observed the incident

## Suspect Statements

When the person who appears to be responsible for an incident is present, there could be an opportunity for the responding security guard to engage with and speak with the individual. While the taking of **suspect statements** is primarily the responsibility of police, a suspect might be talkative while waiting for police to arrive.

As you will learn later in this book, if an individual has been arrested, including by a security guard, a "caution" must be administered to inform the person of their legal rights. While statements made prior to arrest can be recorded in the security professional's notes, the caution should be administered prior to an attempt to interview the person or take a formal statement. This is done to preserve the right to have an individual's admission of involvement, if any, included in the evidence at a subsequent trial.

### suspect statement

a written account or the transcript of a verbal account of an incident in the words of and from the perspective of an individual who has been identified as the suspect in the incident

# How to Take a Statement

Taking a statement is much like telling a story and it is crucial to accurately describe the environment and parameters of the incident. To ensure that the evidential value of a statement remains intact, a security professional must ensure that the witness is identified accurately and his or her identity is recorded on the statement form along with all contact information. In addition, the person who is taking the statement must be identified in the event that that person is required to give testimony in court about the circumstances under which the statement was taken.

In some instances, a witness may not be able to write the statement and the person taking the statement may be required to transcribe what the witness says. In a case such as this, it is important for the security professional to indicate in a short paragraph that he or she was asked to write the statement on the witness's behalf. The witness will then read, sign, and verify that the transcription is accurate to the best of his or her recollection.

A thorough statement should include the following:

- full name of the person making the statement;
- contact information of the person making the statement;
- date, time, and location of the statement;
- identity and credentials of the security professional taking the statement;
- word-for-word transcription of the witness's recollection of what transpired;
- details of the impact the incident had on the witness;
- closing paragraph in which the witness asserts that the contents are a true reflection of the facts to the best of the witness's knowledge, and an assertion that he or she has read the statement and was given an opportunity to correct it; and
- witness's signature and date of signature.

As when writing a report, when taking a statement a security professional must make sure that the following six questions are answered:

1. **Who** was involved?
2. **What** happened?
3. **When** did it happen?
4. **Where** did it happen?
5. **Why** did it happen?
6. **How** did it happen?

## Security Spotlight

### ADVOKATE to Assess the Reliability of Witness Statements

It is important that the statements and reports created by security professionals contain only facts and not opinions. Security guards should not comment in their notes about whether or not they believe witnesses to be reliable or credible. However, having an understanding of the factors that increase the reliability of statements can help security professionals remember which questions to ask of a witness. A 1977 decision of the UK House of Lords (a high-level court), *R v Turnbull*, led to the development of a useful acronym: "ADVOKATE." **ADVOKATE** is used to remember factors that affect statement reliability. Here are the ADVOKATE factors:

- A** Amount of time: How long was the person in view?
- D** Distance: How far away was the person?
- V** Visibility: What was the visibility like?
- O** Obstruction: Did anything obstruct the view?
- K** Known or seen before: Had the person been known or seen before?
- A** Any reason to remember: What made the person or incident memorable to the witness?
- T** Time-lapse: How long has passed since the sighting?
- E** Errors in the description: Any changes in the description of the person?

When taking statements, try to keep the ADVOKATE factors in view so that you can either ask appropriate questions of the statement-maker, or add relevant details to your notebook (for example, notes about weather or lighting that might have affected visibility).

**ADVOKATE**  
an acronym for a  
protocol for assessing  
the accuracy of an eye  
witness's statement



## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter we described the purpose of note taking and its importance to later report writing and court proceedings. We explained how to maintain a notebook and what content to include in (and exclude from) notes.

Notes might be used later as the basis of an incident report, or another kind of report. Several types of reports were described in this chapter. Because they will do it every day of their professional life, writing proper and complete reports is one of the most important communication skills developed by security professionals. It is, therefore, in their best interests to learn, practise, and perfect this skill to the best of their ability.

We also discussed different types of statements and how to take comprehensive and accurate statements from victims, witnesses, and suspects.

Today, many security companies no longer keep hard copies of reports, notes, and statements; they have transitioned into electronic record-keeping. This method of record-keeping allows for more effective and efficient organization and maintenance of information. Although today's methods are very effective and user-friendly, proper measures must be taken to ensure the security of all confidential information.

## KEY TERMS

ADVOKATE, 80

form report, 74

general occurrence report, 74

specialized report, 74

supplemental report, 76

suspect statements, 79

victim statement, 79

witness statement, 79

## REFERENCE

*R v Turnbull*, (1977) QB 224 (CA).

## PERFORMANCE APPLICATION

### Multiple Choice

- When preparing an occurrence report, a security professional should:
  - copy word-for-word from notes in his or her notebook
  - consider whether any content in the notebook reflects poorly on the employer and should be left out
  - use the contents of the notebook as a memory aid and a source of precise details recorded at the time of the incident
  - destroy the relevant notebook pages as soon as the occurrence report is completed
  - avoid reference to the notes so that he or she will not be accused of copying from them
- \_\_\_\_\_ are things security guards know for certain and that they can substantiate.
  - Inferences
  - Facts
  - Assumptions
  - Opinions
  - all of the above
- The best place for safekeeping of a notebook during a security guard's shift is
  - in the guard's physical possession
  - in the trunk of a patrol car
  - in a storage cabinet in a staff-only location such as a furnace room
  - in a filing cabinet in the Control room
  - any of the above
- Accurate and complete record-keeping is an essential aspect of a security professional's work because
  - it is a skill of particular focus in performance reviews
  - many security guards lack skill in explaining events verbally with clarity
  - it helps to overcome language barriers in diverse work environments
  - it serves as a permanent record of events that have occurred and serves to communicate information about the occurrence to others
  - the attention level involved in writing records helps keep security professionals alert, particularly during night shifts
- When preparing a report or taking a statement, it is important to include details about
  - who was involved
  - what happened
  - where the incident took place
  - when the incident took place (time and date)
  - all of the above
- Occurrence reports should be submitted to a supervisor:
  - as a follow-up to a conflict with the supervisor
  - at the end of every shift
  - at least once per hour
  - occurrence reports should never be submitted to one's direct supervisor
  - whenever an incident of significance occurs
- The narrative portion of an occurrence report should always be written
  - in chronological order
  - in point form
  - in 100 words or less
  - in black ink
  - without reference to names of individuals to protect their privacy
- Which of these is NOT a standard note-taking rule?
  - notes should be in ink
  - errors should be thoroughly erased
  - notes should be concise
  - notes should be free of opinions, judgments, and speculation
  - note takers should avoid the use of jargon or slang

## Write a Report

Write a detailed report, using the information provided below. Be sure to organize the information appropriately and clearly, and include all essential details about what occurred.

- Black Honda Civic had scratches and red paint transfers on the driver side front bumper
- Incident occurred at 2030 hours
- Red Toyota Corolla was parked on the shoulder of the highway
- Incident happened 75 km west of Ottawa on a private service road maintained by security professional's employer
- White Chevy Cruze was flipped over onto its roof in the left lane of the highway and there was blood on the hood
- Red Toyota Corolla only had scratches and black paint transfer on its passenger rear bumper
- Dead moose located 20 metres from the location of the flipped-over vehicle
- Chevy Cruze was not hit by another vehicle
- It was foggy and -5 degrees

