

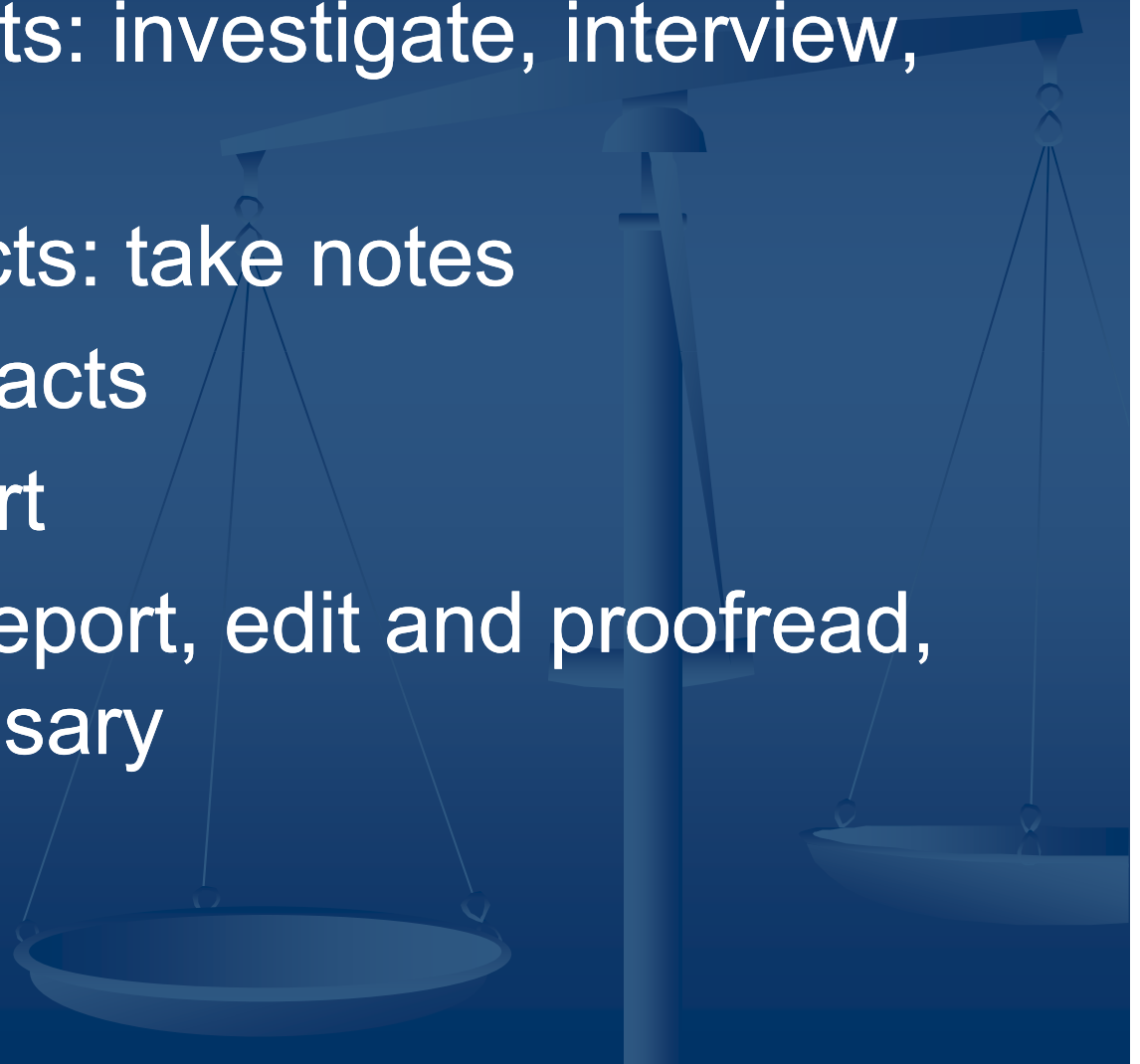
Criminal Justice Written Communications

FTR: Steps in Report Writing



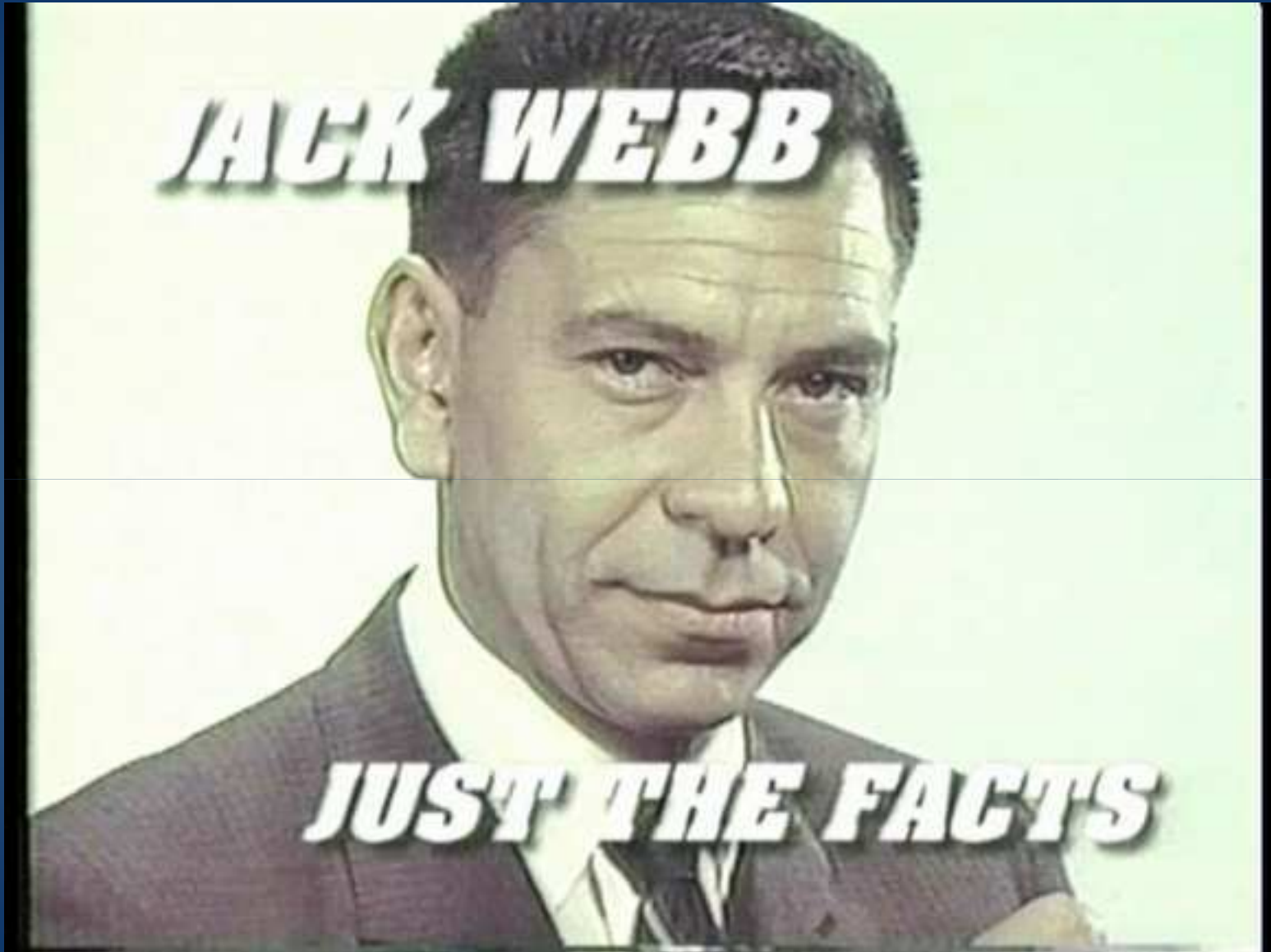
Five Basic Steps

1. Gather the facts: investigate, interview, interrogate
2. Record the facts: take notes
3. Organize the facts
4. Write the report
5. Evaluate the report, edit and proofread, revise if necessary



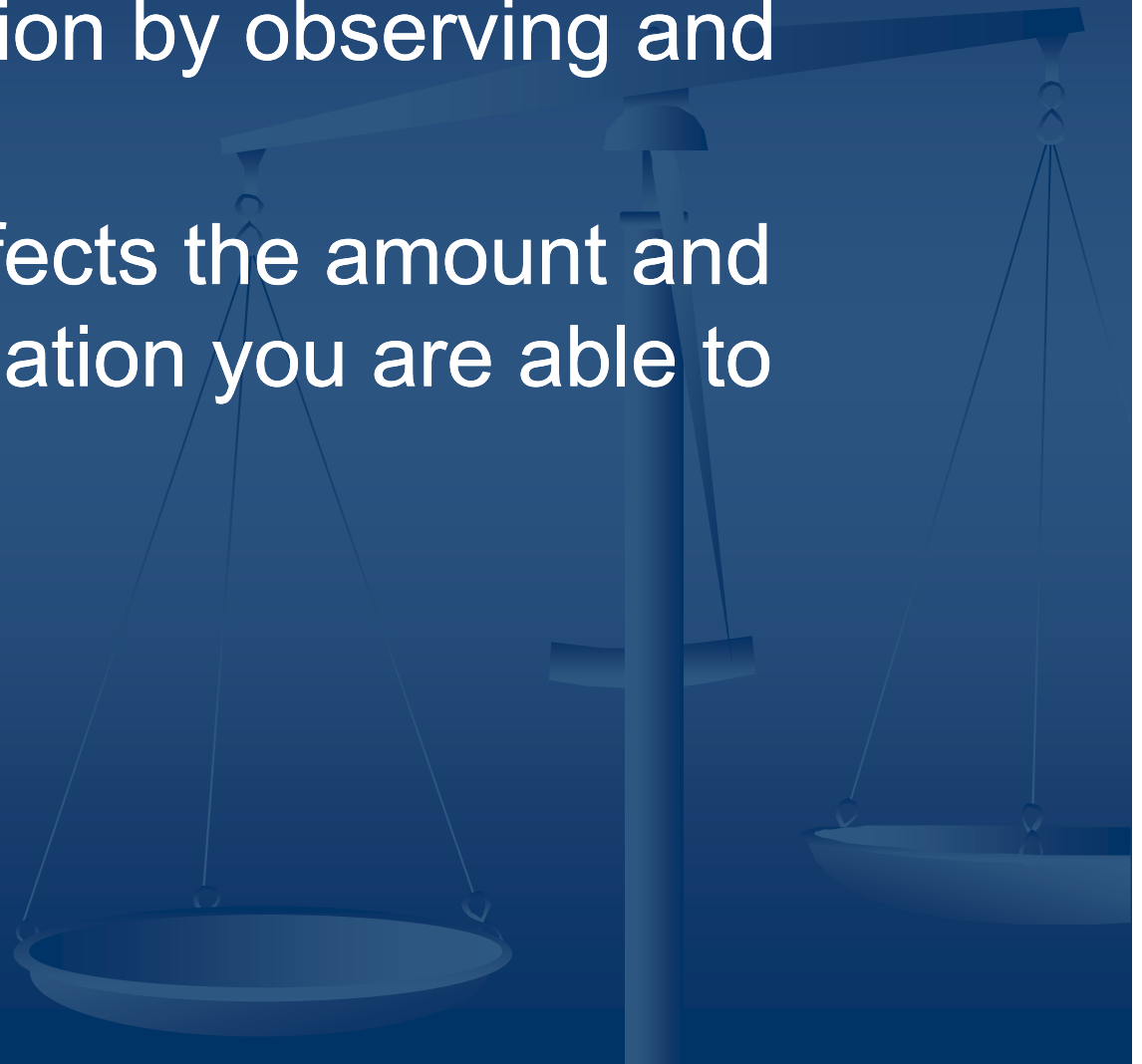
ACK WEBB

JUST THE FACTS



1. Gathering the Facts

- Gather information by observing and listening
- Your attitude effects the amount and quality of information you are able to gather



1. Gathering the Facts

- Be considerate and respectful
 - Victims will not feel at ease with you if you are rude, abrupt, arrogant or officious
 - Suspects will not tell you anything if you don't treat them with respect
- Use a private setting if possible
 - Patrol car, inside victim's house, in a room separate from others, etc.
- Eliminate physical barriers when possible
 - Car windows, desks, counters
- Sit rather than stand
 - People talk more easily when they are comfortable

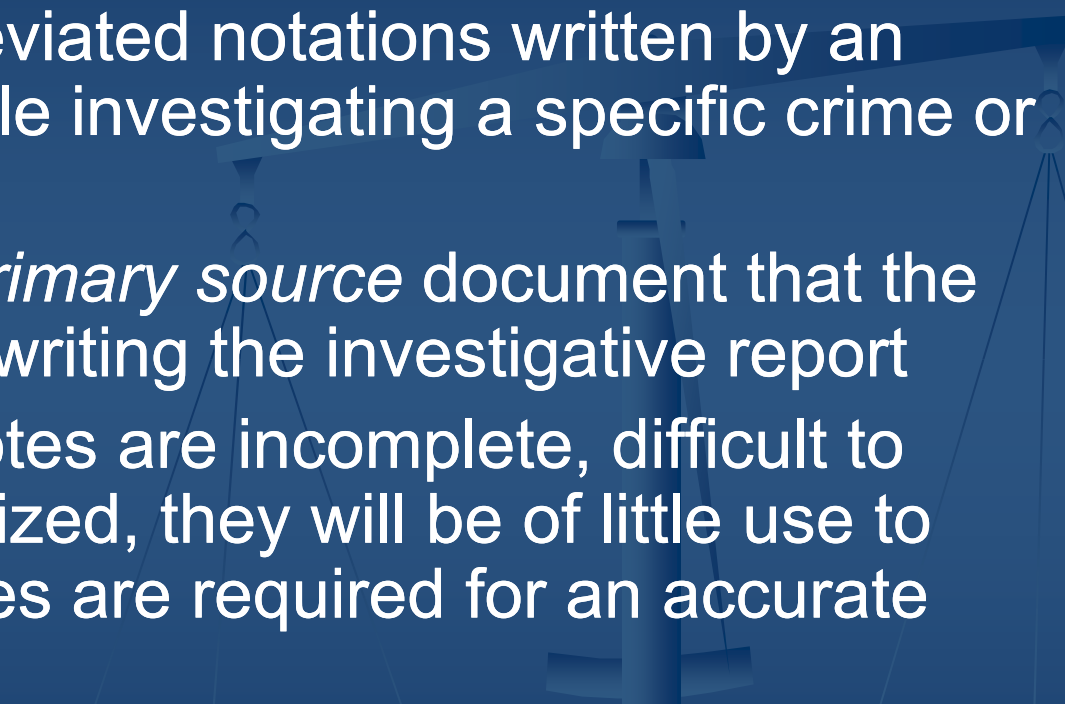
1. Gathering the Facts

- Encourage conversation
 - Use opened ended questions
 - What happened then? Tell me what you saw? What did the suspect look like?
 - Keep your own talking to a minimum
 - Avoiding asking yes/no questions
 - Give subject time to pause, organize his/her thoughts
- Be objective and controlled
 - Be courteous
 - Do not antagonize the subject, use profanity, lose your temper or use physical force

1. Gathering the Facts

- Let the victim tell his/her story once through
 - **Listen**
 - This allows victim to get the story *out*
 - It will come out chaotically, not chronologically
 - Victim will calm down, organize his/her thoughts
- Then, have the victim repeat the story
 - **Take notes, ask clarifying questions, go at your pace**
 - This time it will come out clearer, more chronologically, with fewer tangents

2. Taking Field Notes

- Field notes are abbreviated notations written by an officer in the field while investigating a specific crime or incident
 - Field notes are the *primary source* document that the officer will use when writing the investigative report
 - If the officer's field notes are incomplete, difficult to read, or poorly organized, they will be of little use to that officer Good notes are required for an accurate and thorough report
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2. Field Notes

- Field notes are recorded while information is fresh in the investigating officer's mind
- Always verify names, spelling, addresses, phone numbers, dates
- Notes should be taken:
 - At the scene of the event or incident
 - When interviewing persons (suspects, witnesses, victims)
 - Whenever an officer wishes to record specific facts for inclusion in the report
 - Any time the officer wishes to remember specific details at a later time



When determining what to include in field notes, an officer should consider the points noted below:

Consideration	Explanation
Field notes are more reliable than an officer's memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ An investigative report is often written several hours after an investigation has occurred■ Certain types of information such as statements, times, observations, addresses, weather conditions, etc., are easily forgotten or confused with other information if not recorded while still fresh in the officer's mind
Field notes are the primary source of information for the investigative report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Well taken notes provide officers with the <i>detailed information</i> they need write an accurate report■ Well organized notes will help officers capture vital information regarding the events, persons, statements, etc., related to the investigation

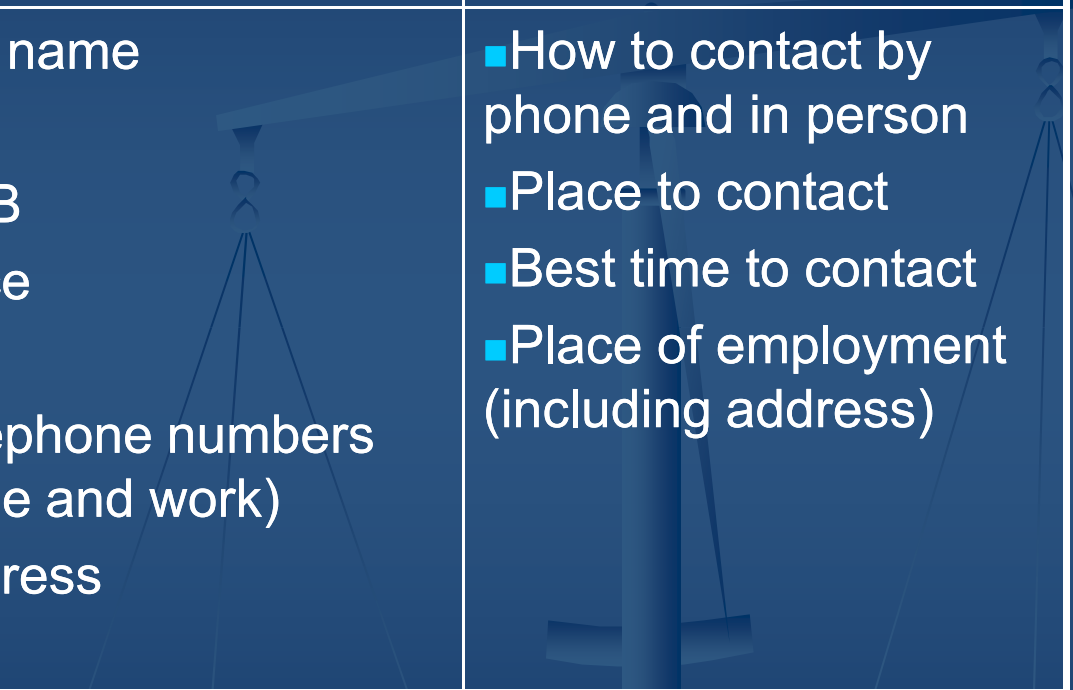
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Consideration	Explanation
Detailed field notes reduce the need to re-contact involved parties at a later time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Complete field notes should contain enough information to answer any pertinent questions about the incident or persons involved
Field notes can be used to defend the credibility of a report	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ An officer's field notes can be an indicator of that officer's thoroughness and efficiency as an investigator■ During a trial, an officer may be asked to identify the source used in writing a report. If the officer relied on his or her field notes, the reliability and credibility of the report may be easier to defend.

Information to Include in Your Notes

- Every crime, event, or incident is different and will vary in details
- For every incident, the officer's field notes must contain the facts and information that will aid that officer in answering the questions

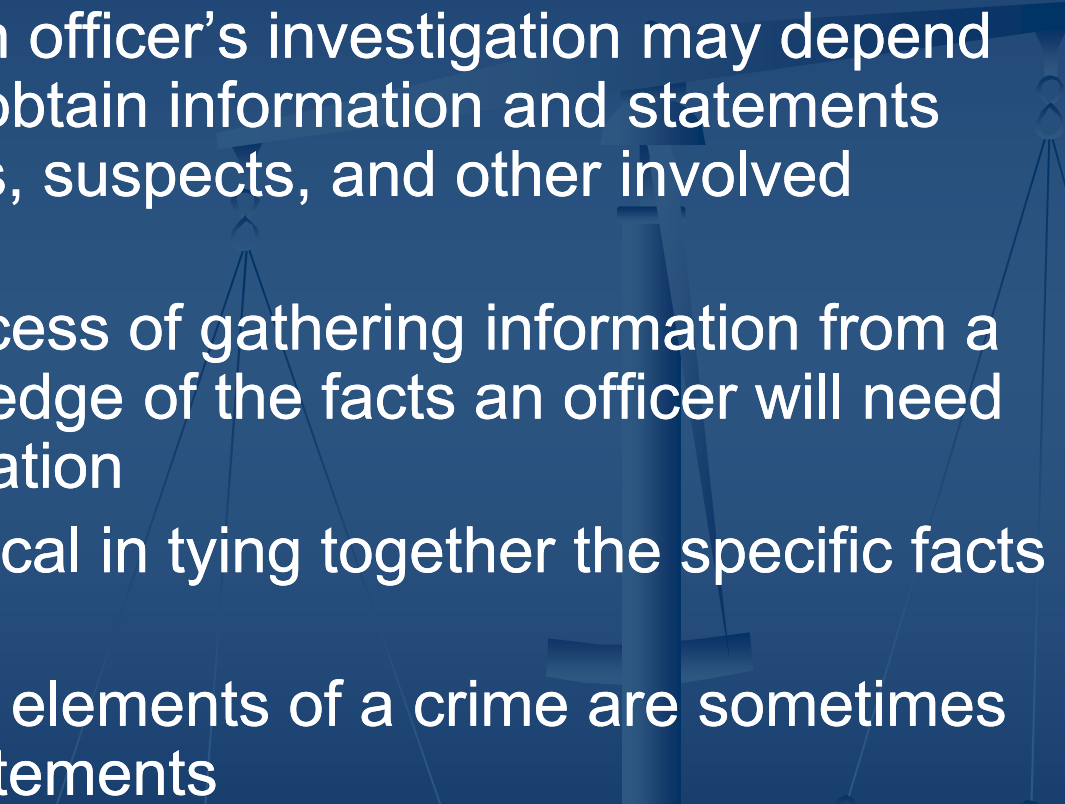
what, when, where, who, how and why



	Basic Information	Examples of Additional Information
Victims and witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Full name■ Age■ DOB■ Race■ Sex■ Telephone numbers (home and work)■ Address	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How to contact by phone and in person■ Place to contact■ Best time to contact■ Place of employment (including address)

	Basic Information	Examples of Additional Information
Occurrence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Type of crime■ Location■ Date and time of incident■ Date and time reported■ Physical evidence■ Chain of custody■ Direction of suspect's flight■ Type of weapon(s)■ Direct statements made by the suspect■ Case number■ Assisting officers' actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Persons involved<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Informants■ Reporting party■ Victims■ Witnesses■ Suspects■ Officers■ Members of other agencies■ Medical personnel■ Members of the media

Notetaking Process During a Field Interview

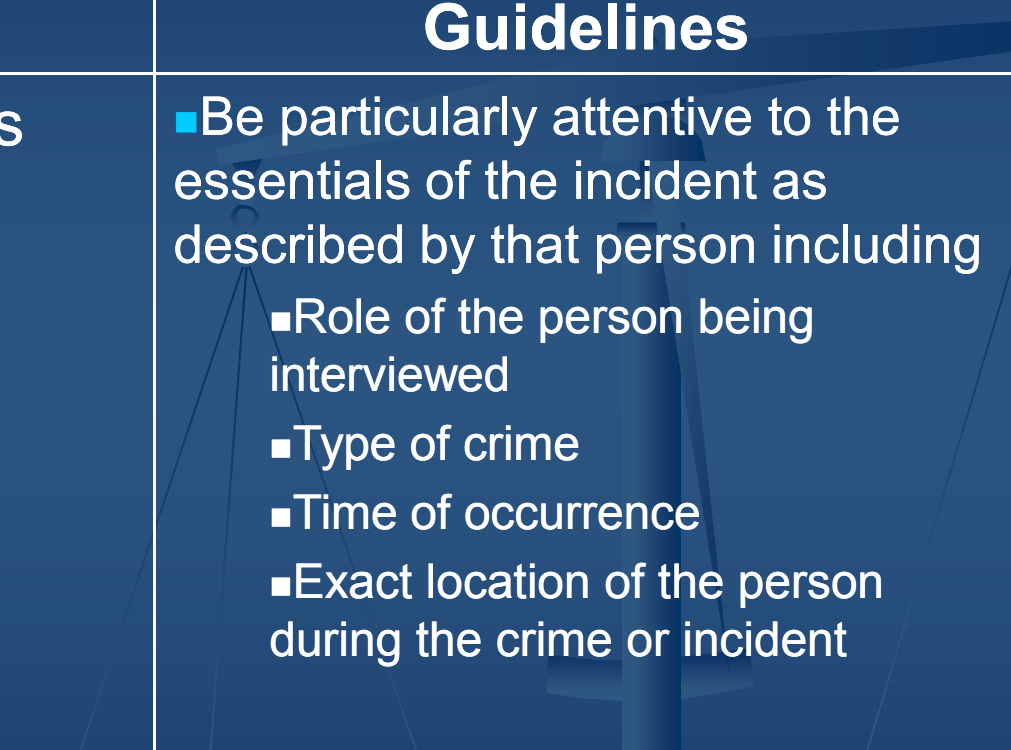
- The effectiveness of an officer's investigation may depend on his or her ability to obtain information and statements from witnesses, victims, suspects, and other involved parties
 - An interview is the process of gathering information from a person who has knowledge of the facts an officer will need to conduct the investigation
 - Statements can be critical in tying together the specific facts of an incident or crime
 - The existence of some elements of a crime are sometimes only be revealed in statements
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Recording the Interview

- Some officers choose to use a small recording device while conducting an interview
 - This may inhibit the person from talking
 - It also may malfunction
- Even if an officer is recording the interview, that officer should take thorough and complete notes of the conversation

Actions prior to the interview	Guidelines
Separate the involved parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ If possible, move the person to a location where there will be no interruption or distractions■ Focus the person's attention on speaking with you rather than interacting with others
Establish rapport	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Tell the interviewee why the interview is being conducted■ Describe the interview process■ Assure the person that by using this process you (the officer) will be able to gather that person's statement accurately■ Be courteous, considerate and patient■ Control the interview by remaining calm and polite

Action	Guidelines
Ask the person to recount what has happened	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Allow the person to speak freely■ Have the person describe the incident just as he or she understands it, using his or her own words
Keep the person focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ If the person wanders from the subject, guide the person back (“You mentioned that...” “Let’s go back to...”)■ Maintain eye contact and use nonverbal gestures (such as nodding your head) to encourage the person to talk



Action	Guidelines
<p>Listen carefully to what is being said</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Be particularly attentive to the essentials of the incident as described by that person including<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Role of the person being interviewed■ Type of crime■ Time of occurrence■ Exact location of the person during the crime or incident

Action	Guidelines
Obtain identification information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Confirm the person's role in the event■ Note the person's<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Complete name■ Address and phone numbers (home and work)■ Any other info necessary for ID
Ask the interviewee to repeat his or her account of what happened again	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Guide the interview by asking questions that will keep the person from getting distracted■ Stop the person to ask questions to clarify points■ Write down information in short statements■ If the statement is particularly important, have the person stop speaking while capturing the entire statement
Ask questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Obtain descriptions of property, suspects, etc.

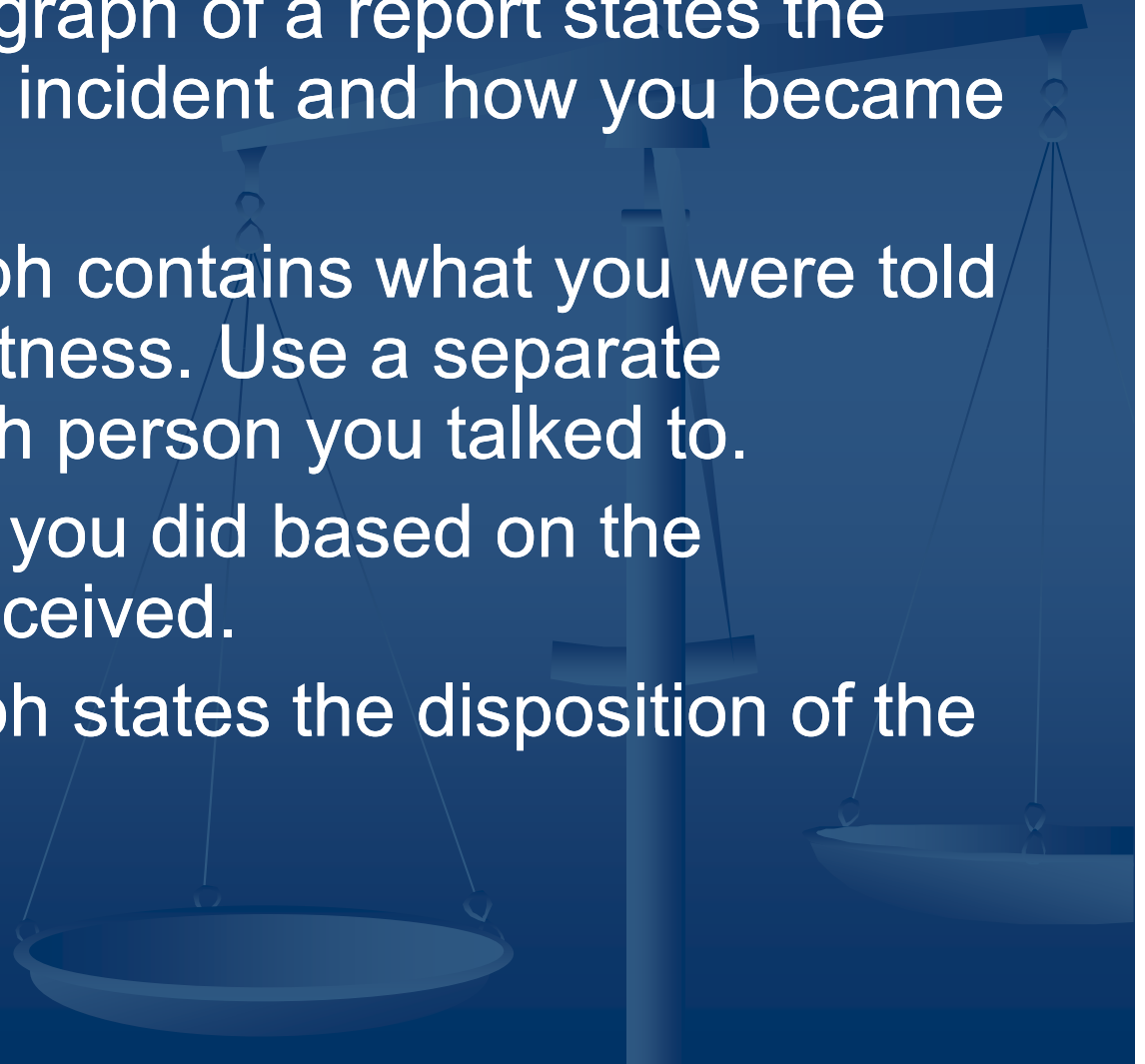
Action	Guidelines
Review information with interviewee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Repeat specific information to verify that the information is correct■ Give the person an opportunity to add facts
Ask for confirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Have the person confirm important details<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Direct quotes■ Time relationships■ Information regarding weapons■ Physical descriptions
Make modifications or corrections as necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Information may have been initially recorded incorrectly because the officer<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Misunderstood the interviewee■ Wrote something down incorrectly■ The officer's wording might incorrectly characterize the interviewee's statement
Verify changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Verify all changes with the interviewee

3. Organize the Facts

- If a report skips from one idea to another, repeats or goes back and forth in time, it will not present a clear picture of what happened
- Outline your report
- Use paragraphs to separate different types of information
- Put information in chronological order
- Establish a format for your 1st and 2nd sentences
 - 1st sentence: On (date) at (time), I was dispatched to a reported (crime) at (location/address), followed by *brief* description of house/area
 - 2nd sentence: On arrival, I (your first action).
 - Your first action is typically “met with (name of victim)”

3. Organize the Facts

- The opening paragraph of a report states the time, date, type of incident and how you became involved.
- The next paragraph contains what you were told by the victim or witness. Use a separate paragraph for each person you talked to.
- Next, record what you did based on the information you received.
- The final paragraph states the disposition of the case.

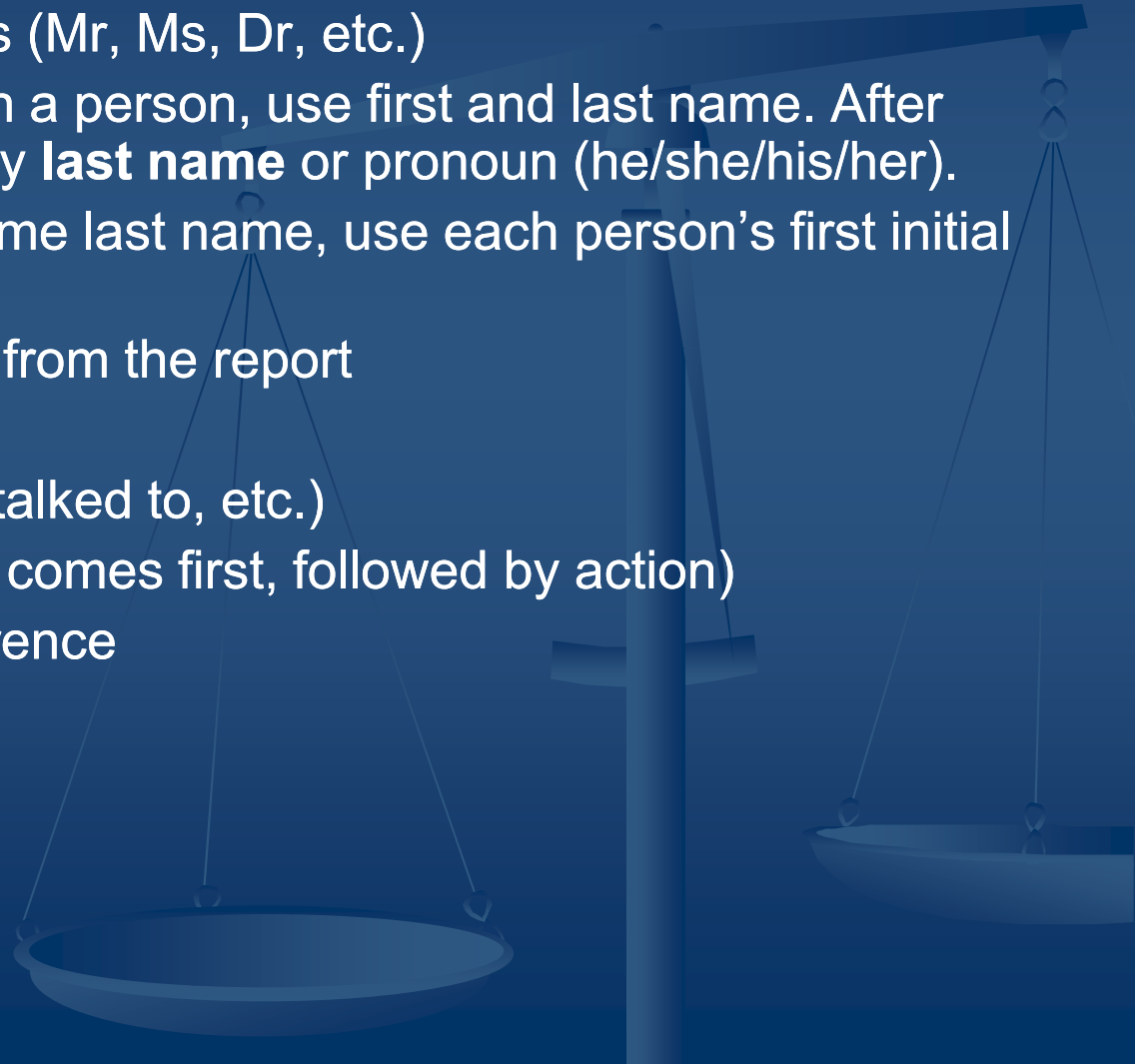


4. Write the Report

- *Elements of the crime:* conditions that must exist and be proven to exist in order for an act to be called a specific crime.
 - Murder 187 PC
 - Rape 261 PC
 - Burglary 459 PC
 - Robbery 211 PC
 - Larceny 484, 487 PC
 - Arson 451 PC
- Use language in your report that includes the elements of the crime and clearly describes the crime that is believed to have been committed
- Incidents
 - Abandoned vehicle, animal bite, found property, lost or missing person, accident, neighborhood dispute, suicide, etc.

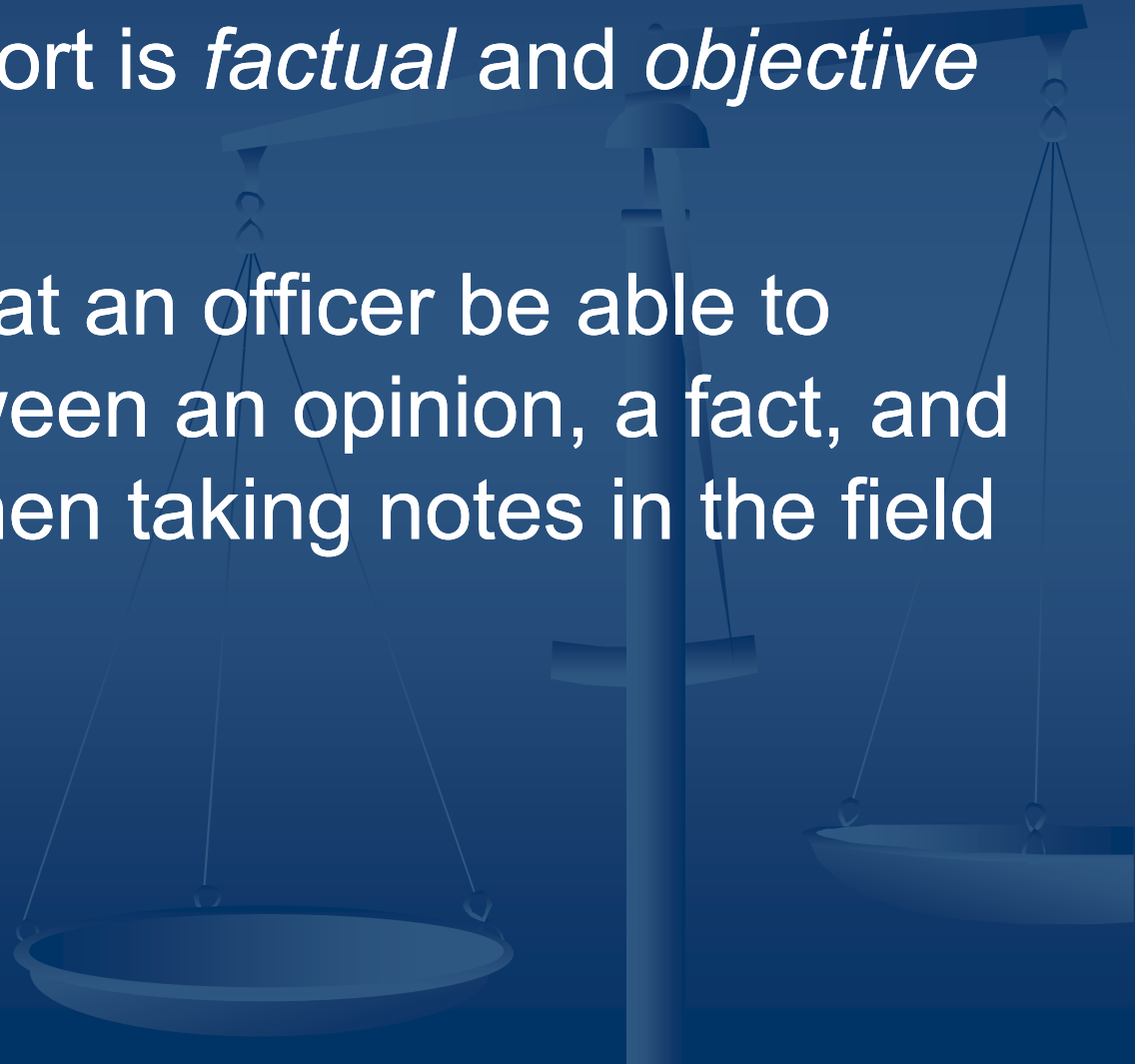
Writing Rules

- **Do not** use courtesy titles (Mr, Ms, Dr, etc.)
- The first time you mention a person, use first and last name. After that, refer to the person by **last name** or pronoun (he/she/his/her).
- If two people have the same last name, use each person's first initial with last name.
- Omit your own questions from the report
- Use past tense verbs
- Use first person (I saw, I talked to, etc.)
- Use active voice (subject comes first, followed by action)
- Use proper pronoun reference



Opinions, Facts and Conclusions

- An effective report is *factual* and *objective*
- This requires that an officer be able to distinguish between an opinion, a fact, and a conclusion when taking notes in the field



	Description	Example
OPINION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ A statement that<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Is open to interpretation■ Expresses a belief not necessarily substantiated by proof	The victim was in pain.
FACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ A statement that<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Can be verified or proven■ Has real, demonstrable existence	The victim's arm was broken.
CONCLUSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ A statement that<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Is based on the analysis of facts and opinions■ Conclusions should always be accompanied and supported by facts	The victim was not able to explain what had happened because she was in pain due to her broken arm.

Relevant & Irrelevant Information

- It is possible for information to be factual and yet still not be relevant to the incident being investigated

Factual and Relevant	Factual but Irrelevant
The address of the incident or crime scene	The route followed to the incident or crime scene
A description of how the suspect was apprehended	The number of fences the officer had to jump while chasing the suspect
Statements given by witnesses	Humorous comments given by bystanders

Relevant & Irrelevant Information

Victim's Statement	Relevant Facts	Irrelevant Facts
"I just bought this bike from the guy down the street a couple weeks ago. It wasn't new but was in really good shape. I parked the bike in front of my building at the bottom of the stairs after a long ride. I didn't bother locking it or anything because I thought it would be safe there, you know."	The bike was left unlocked in front of the victim's residence.	The bike was used, though new to the victim. The victim had just come back from a long ride.
"I went inside my apartment to fill my water bottle and was gone less than 5 minutes."	The bike was left unattended for about 5 minutes.	The victim went into his apartment to fill his water bottle.

Relevant & Irrelevant Information

Victim's Statement	Relevant Facts	Irrelevant Facts
"When I came back out, the bike was gone. I was really mad and started yelling and cursing. I looked up and down the street but didn't see anyone or any signs of my bike."	The victim did not see or hear a suspect.	The victim yelled and cursed when he realized his bike had been stolen.

5. Evaluate, Edit, Proofread, Revise

- Is the report
 - Factual
 - Accurate
 - Objective
 - Complete
 - Chronological
 - Concise
 - Clear
 - Mechanically correct
 - Written in standard English
- If not, revise it



Sources

- POST LD 18, Version 2
- For the Record, 6th Edition - Hess & Orthmann, Ch 4

