



POLICE SCIENCE

Investigation and Report Writing



Investigation and Report Writing

~ CHAPTER 26 ~

Topics and concepts included in this chapter:

1. Guidelines for conducting good interviewing techniques.
2. Basic tasks to follow in preliminary investigations.
3. Commonly used Department forms.
4. Guidelines for proper preliminary investigations.
5. Investigating units and the types of complaints referred to these units.
6. The procedure to follow regarding the theft of electronic devices.
7. The procedure to follow regarding lost property and identify the victim/witness assistance programs.
8. The Complaint Report Worksheet captions.

Mandatory Patrol Guide Procedures

P.G. 207-01	Complaint Reporting System
P.G. 207-02	Complaints Not Recorded on Complaint Report
P.G. 207-03	Voiding Complaint Reports
P.G. 207-04	Reporting of Complaints Occurring in Another Command
P.G. 207-07	Preliminary Investigation of Complaints (Other than Vice Related or Narcotics Complaints)
P.G. 207-09	Follow-up Investigations of Complaints Already Recorded
P.G. 207-12	Lost or Stolen Property/Identity Theft
P.G. 207-14	Robbery Complaints Involving Police Impersonation
P.G. 207-28	Recording of Complaints Occurring within the New York City Transit System
P.G. 207-36	Complaints Involving Cellular Telephones
P.G. 207-38	Complaints Involving Sex Crimes



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- P.G. 212-12 Citywide Intelligence Reporting System
- P.G. 212-90 Guidelines for Interaction with Limited English Proficient (LEP) Persons
- P.G. 212-104 Interaction with Hearing Impaired Persons



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INVESTIGATION AND REPORT WRITING

Investigation is the process of finding the facts about a particular subject, event, or problem. It should be designed to eliminate as much uncertainty as possible about what happened during an event or about what caused or is associated with a problem. The report of an investigation should complete this process – after readers have reviewed it, they should know everything the writer knows, and should have very little uncertainty about the facts.

When most of us think of police investigation, we think of crime and detective work. Certainly, criminal investigation may be the most important of all the investigative tasks we perform, but it is far from the only one. The Department conducts investigations to determine whether or not its policies are effective; to design policies and training; to determine whether citizens' complaints have any merit; to determine whether units function as they should, and on and on.

In almost all these cases, the key component of investigation is the patrol officer, who is the Department's front line, the first person on the scene of most incidents that become subjects of investigation. For the most part, it is through the patrol officer that the Department becomes aware of *complaints*, and most other matters. Consequently, it is critical that patrol officers collect all the relevant information and that they report it thoroughly, clearly, and to the appropriate people and units.

Complaints are allegations of crimes, violations, and conditions, which require an investigation. These are officially recorded and processed using the Complaint Reporting System. The process through which complaints are investigated begins with the preparation of a written report. If this is not done right, a complaint may not be investigated or may be investigated incorrectly. In addition, precinct statistics compiled from Complaint Reports are used to make decisions regarding deployment, specifically, assignment of Radio Motor Patrols (RMPs), foot posts and specialized units (such as Anti-Crime). If these statistics are inaccurate, serious criminal conditions can go undetected, and both the public and your fellow officers may be endangered. Not caring, or not taking the time, to conduct a proper preliminary investigation reflects negatively on the entire Police Department. Most importantly, it can greatly reduce the Department's ability to do its job.

For you personally, sloppy or incomplete reports can cause embarrassment, lost criminal prosecutions, and acquittals of guilty people. Whenever you make a shoddy report related to a crime or arrest, you are almost certain to be cross-examined intensely by the lawyers for the people you have arrested. When lawyers can point out to the jury all the errors and omissions you have made in your official reports, the credibility of everything you say becomes questionable and guilty people are likely to walk out the door.



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INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

The most important investigative information usually comes from people. Therefore, it is critical that you learn how to communicate with people in ways that are most likely to produce the maximum amount of information. Every excellent investigator is an excellent interviewer.

A very important part of interviewing technique is that interviews should be conducted as soon as possible after the incidents that are the subjects of investigation. This is so for two reasons. First, people's memories fade quickly. Second, people's recollections of events become contaminated over time. When people witness a dramatic street event – a robbery and shooting, for example – it usually happens so quickly and with so little warning that they do not have time to process it. But as time goes by, they think about the event – or, even worse, talk about it with others who have seen it from other angles. Invariable, they forget what they actually saw and come up with a composite based on information they develop later.

Here's an example:

Charley hears shots and sees a man, later identified as Joe, run out of a store, chased by another man, later identified as Jim. Jim has a gun in his hand, and is pointing it in Joe's direction. Joe starts to turn on his pursuer, and Charley hears more shots. Joe falls down, and a car parked nearby suddenly takes off, accelerating away from the scene. Jim starts to run after the car, but then turns and runs back into the store. This whole episode lasts no more than four or five seconds.

Charley waits for the police and starts to talk with other people, some of whom were on the scene when the shooting occurred and some of whom were drawn to the scene by the shooting. It is evident that Joe is dead in the gutter, and that there is a small gym bag near his body. Someone tells Charley that Jim is the owner of the store. Charley had never seen Jim before, but this makes sense to him. Someone tells him that Joe was trying to rob Jim and had fired shots at Jim inside the store. This also makes sense, although Charley never noticed whether Joe had a gun. Someone tells him that Jim then pulled his own gun, and chased Joe from the store, firing shots at Joe only when Joe turned and fired at him first. Another person tells Charley that Joe was running toward the "getaway car," and that its driver escaped.



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Officers and detectives arrive, but do not interview Charley for an hour or more. He spends the time talking with other people. Finally, an officer asks Charley what happened. He says:

“It was a stick-up. Joe, the dead guy, pulled a gun and fired shots at Jim, the storeowner. But the storeowner pulled his own gun and shot back. Then the dead guy ran away with the storeowner chasing him. He turned on the storeowner and fired again, so the storeowner shot him. The guy in the car who was with the dead guy got away.”

The officer looks at Charley strangely. “No”, the officer says. “This was not a stick-up. It was a drug deal gone bad. Joe owned the store, but he was a drug dealer. He sold the other guy bad dope and, as soon as the other guy realized it, he lost his head and shot Joe. That car was with Jim, but the driver took off because he hadn’t bargained for a murder. We’re looking to find Jim now, but we didn’t find any evidence that Joe had a gun.”

Assume that Jim is caught and tried for murder: how useful would this eyewitness’s testimony be? What would he have said if he had been interviewed earlier, before his account had been contaminated by exposure to other witnesses?

When we can get to witnesses immediately after the event and interview them as soon as possible, we are likely to get the most accurate and useful information from them. The importance of responding quickly, but safely, to the scene of a police incident cannot be overemphasized. This becomes extremely important when responding to a possible crime scene. By arriving as soon as possible, you will be better able to preserve the integrity of the scene and any evidence left behind by the perpetrator. Witnesses are more likely to be present, and the victim will most vividly recall what occurred during and after the crime. Conducting a good interview is vital to a preliminary investigation. Knowing how and when to ask the right questions is a skill that you will develop through experience and good police work in your career. Properly preparing an accurate Complaint Report Worksheet will assist you, as well as investigators, in the process of identification and apprehension of perpetrators and case presentation to the District Attorney’s office.

You will face a difficult task when attempting to interview victims of crimes in crisis situations. The emotional state of the victim must be addressed to restore a sense of normalcy. When obtaining information in an interview for the necessary