

WRITING MECHANICS IN PROFESSIONAL REPORTS

^x COURSE OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Improve report quality
- ▶ Characteristics of a good report
- ▶ Using concrete terms
- ▶ Sentence fragments
- ▶ Writing in the active voice, first person, and past tense
- ▶ Subject/verb agreement
- ▶ Proper use of the comma, apostrophe, and quotation marks
- ▶ Syntax

GRAMMAR IMPORTANCE

- ▶ Grammar is a means of organization.
- ▶ Understanding grammar helps you think logically.
- ▶ The more comfortable you are with the logic of grammar, the more clearly and meaningfully you will be able to think and communicate.
- ▶ Grammar helps define who you are.

CONCRETE TERMS AND GETTING SPECIFIC

- ▶ Can be seen and touched
- ▶ Name and describe in detail
- ▶ *Object:*
- ▶ *Actions:*
- ▶ *Behaviors:*

ADVANTAGES OF CONCRETE TERMS

- ▶ Core definition: Hot, Cold, 70 degrees?

- ▶ Prevents misinterpretation

“The suspect made lewd and profane statements to the victim.”

- Define lewd and profane

“The suspect used racially biased words.”

- Define racially biased words

CONCRETE AND ABSTRACT?

“The inmate gave me the book.”

“[REDACTED] gave me the paperback book he was holding.”

“Fearing for officer safety, a pat down search was conducted on the inmate.”

“I conducted a contraband pat down search on [REDACTED]”

“The inmate resisted, so I used force to place him in handcuffs.”

“[REDACTED] resisted the search by refusing to comply with my orders to place his hands behind his back.”

LADDER OF ABSTRACTION

- ▶ Animal
- ▶ Mammal
- ▶ Dog
- ▶ Terrier
- ▶ Bull Terrier
- ▶ Brown Bull Terrier

- ▶ Resisted
- ▶ Resisted my verbal commands
- ▶ Resisted my verbal commands by refusing to place his hands behind his back.
- ▶ Resisted my verbal commands by refusing to place his hands behind his back and tensing up both of his arms.

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

1. Smith walking toward the pod with his jumpsuit ripped and his nose bleeding.
2. I escorted to an interview room; used for mental health evaluations and interviews.
3. Two half inch impact marks to the left side of her neck, and a eighth inch cut to the left inner portion of her lower lip.

COMMAS

- ▶ Commas separate a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence

▶ Ex.: Smith told me, “I didn’t see anything.”

- ▶ Do you use a comma when you pause?

- ▶ Commas are used to separate three or more items in a series

EXAMPLE

- ▶ In cell #46, I found red, blue, black, and green pens.
- ▶ In cell #46, I found red, blue, black and green pens.

COMMA SPLICES

Do not use a comma to separate two independent clauses.

1. I asked [redacted] if he understood his rights. He said, "yes."
2. I asked [redacted] if he understood his rights, he said, "yes."
3. Inmate [redacted] said, "I was on the phone with my lady, I did not see anyone fighting."
4. Inmate [redacted] said, "I was on the phone with my lady. I did not see anyone fighting."

CAPATILIZATION

- ▶ **Do not** capitalize the word “inmate” when it precedes a proper name.
- ▶ I escorted inmate [REDACTED] to an interview room.
- ▶ **Do not** capitalize a title unless it precedes a proper name.
- ▶ I called for Deputy Smith, but a different deputy arrived.

APOSTROPHES

- ▶ I searched inmate Smiths property box
- ▶ I took six pictures of the victims injuries
- ▶ I took three pictures of the suspects right hand.
- ▶ Inmate Smiths property box and all of it's contents were placed on his bunk.
- ▶ Inmate Smith said one of the deputies ripped his attorneys business card.

THERE, THEIR, THEY'RE

- ▶ The inmate left his mattress there on the bunk.
- ▶ The deputies went to the station after their safety check.
- ▶ Smith responded, "They're a bunch of lunatics."

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Your ear usually tells you if subject/verb agreement is wrong. The verb of a singular subject usually end in "s."

- The inmate **seems** to **be lying**.
- The inmates **seem** to be lying.
- The inmate **has** lied.
- The inmates **have** lied
- The inmate **is** lying
- The inmates **are** lying

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Any word that ends with “one,” “body,” and “thing” is singular; e.g., everyone, everybody, everything.

- Everything **was** on the inmate’s bunk.
- Everybody **was** in the recreation area.
- Everyone **was** searched.
- Staff (were or was?)

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE

- Use a singular verb when two or more subjects connected by *and* are preceded by *each*, *every*, *many a*, *many an*.

EXAMPLE

- **Every** general population inmate, administrative segregation inmate, and protective custody inmate **was (not were)** given an inmate orientation pamphlet.

SPELLING

Word spelling vs.
meaning.

- ▶ Their/There/They're
- ▶ Ate/Eight
- ▶ Pear/Pair
- ▶ See/Sea
- ▶ Write/Right

Transposing letters

- ▶ From vs. Form

Confusing similar
words

- ▶ Affect vs. Effect
- ▶ Then vs. Than

MISPLACED MODIFIERS

Misplaced modifiers are single words, phrases, or clauses that do not point clearly to the word or words they modify. As a rule, related words usually should be kept together.

SYNTAX

Syntax is the study of the rules for forming grammatical sentences.

For the purposes of this class, syntax means “keep related words together.”

The position of the words in a sentence is the principle means of showing their relationship

EXAMPLES

1. I saw a large blood stain on the sheet right in the center.

2. I saw a large blood stain in the center of the sheet.

SYNTAX

The subject of a sentence and the principle verb should not, as a rule, be separated by a phrase or clause that can be moved to the beginning.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ Inmate Smith while in his cell cut his wrist.
- ▶ While in his cell, inmate Smith cut his wrist.
- ▶ Inmate Smith, while in the safety cell, was screaming and kicking the door.
- ▶ While in the safety cell, inmate Smith was screaming and kicking the door.

SYNTAX

EXAMPLES

1. Inmate Smith had a cut under his left eye that was about one inch long.
2. Inmate Smith had a one-inch cut under his left eye.

QUOTATIONS

“Quotation marks” are the writer’s signal to the reader that the written material is verbatim; it is a word-for-word representation of what the speaker (person being quoted) said.

Examples

- ▶ “They were getting into it.”
- ▶ “We were getting into it”
- ▶ They were, “getting into it.”

ACTIVE VOICE

- ▶ Sentences whose subjects perform the action are in the **Active Voice**
- ▶ Sentences whose subjects are acted upon are in the **Passive Voice**

EXAMPLES

1. It was determined that the report was to be written by me.

2. Sergeant [redacted] assigned me the report to write.

ACTIVE VOICE

1. The inmate was put in a rear-wrist lock.

2. I put the inmate in a rear-wrist lock.

3. I placed the items into evidence at 1700 hours, on 02-03-14.

4. The items were placed into evidence on 02-03-14, at 1700 hours, by myself.

5. I opened the safety cell door

6. The safety cell door was opened by me.

ACTIVE VOICE

1. Inmate [REDACTED] was extracted from his cell by the tactical response team.
 2. The tactical response team extracted inmate [REDACTED] from his cell.
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1. Deputy [REDACTED] found a baggy containing marijuana in inmate Smith's left sock when [REDACTED] searched Smith at intake.
 2. The baggy containing marijuana was found in inmate Smith's left sock when he was searched at intake.

CONFUSING PRONOUNS

- ▶ *he, she, it, they, that, this, these, those*
- ▶ These simple words can cause readers great confusion.

WRITING IN THE PAST TENSE

- ▶ When you write a report, everything you are writing about has already happened.
- ▶ Thus reports are obviously written in the past tense.
- ▶ Fortunately, writing in the past tense is simple; i.e., add a “d” or “ed” to the verb.
- ▶ Irregular verbs are the exception

The End