

FIELD NOTE TAKING

PURPOSE...

1. ...to stress the qualities of effective note taking.
2. ...to review the basic guidelines which assure the completeness of notes.
3. ...to discuss the required information of a personal description report.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS...

1. Notes must be readable and contain sufficient details to permit an officer to prepare a complete report or to assist him to testify with accuracy and authority. While conducting an investigation, notes are usually made of the following:
 - ...date, time, case number
 - ...identification of the principals
 - ...description of suspect, witness, the scene
 - ...measurements
 - ...exact remarks
 - ...other details of importance to the case.
- A. All notes recorded in the notebook must have the following qualities:
 - ...legible—not only to the officer
 - ...understandable—convey a complete thought
 - ...concise—brief but factual
 - ...accurate—be correct
- B. Accuracy is one of the more important qualities of notes. Correctness and exactness are required when recording the following:
 - ...the names, addresses and other identification of all persons contacted or involved.
 - ...names and badge number of officers present
 - ...correct description of suspects, vehicles, witnesses, etc.
 - ...correct date and time.
 - ...accurate description of crime or accident scene, measurements, serial number, location of identification mark or evidence.
 - ...all report numbers.

NOTES

2. Accuracy and completeness of notes may be obtained if the officer follows these basic guidelines:

A. Who

- ... victim
- ... suspect
- ... witness
- ... driver, etc.

B. What

- ... property stolen
- ... evidence
- ... vehicle
- ... weapon, etc.

C. Where

- ... location of crime or accident scene
- ... location of arrest

D. When

- ... date time of offense
- ... date time of arrival
- ... date time crime discovered and reported
- ... date time suspect arrested
- ... date time evidence located

E. Why

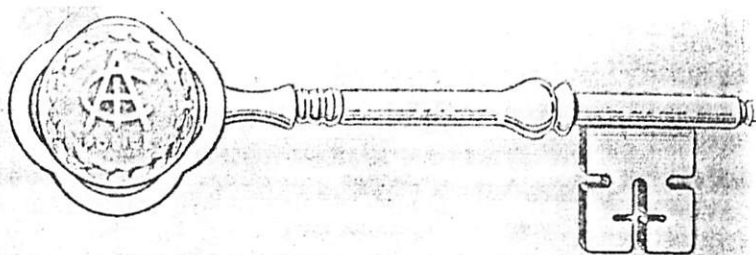
- ... reason for accident
- ... motive

F. How

- ... how did accident occur
- ... how was crime committed

3. Frequently a suspect will escape detection and apprehension because of an inadequate description is broadcast. The following information should be included if at all possible in all wanted reports:

- ... correct full name
- ... nickname or aliases
- ... last known address
- ... sex, race, age, height, weight
- ... complexion
- ... shape of head and face
- ... color of hair, eyes
- ... mustache or beard
- ... clothing worn
- ... any physical characteristics which may facilitate identification.



FIELD NOTE TAKING

A supervisor recommends disciplinary action when an officer fails to report for a new assignment—an officer reports for duty on his day off, forgetting that his group number has been changed—a victim dies, and the investigator cannot recall all of the information he has been given—a defense attorney gains a point when the testifying officer does not remember all the details in the case. These examples are typical of the situations which can involve a police officer who has placed too much reliance on memory alone to recall the past. The truth is, that the embarrassment or the explanation generated by these situations can be generally avoided if information which may have future use is faithfully recorded in a notebook.

This Training Key will discuss the importance of the officer's notebook. It will suggest the type of information it should contain and some of the techniques to be used in recording these facts.

Information Committed to Memory Is Soon Forgotten—Notes Are Permanent

Many variables including ability, training, practice and effort, influence the process of recalling the past. To remember a fact, an incident, a statement, etc., it is necessary to form a mental image of the condition, the object, etc., to be recalled. In turn this image can only be fixed in the mind if close attention has been paid at the time of occurrence and if the object to be remembered has been deliberately committed to memory. When distractions occur, or because full attention is not given to a situation, some details will be overlooked and cannot be committed to memory. The tendency to forget events with the passage of time or when additional details are committed to memory further reflects the unreliability of human retention. On the other hand, notes that are properly recorded and maintained do not change and are available for future use. Time does not affect the accuracy of the written word.

Notes Aid the Investigative Process

The conditions at an accident or crime scene do not blend themselves to a concentrated study "of things to remember." Many tasks need immediate attention and must be performed without hesitation. Performance is, to a degree, instinctive—the crime or accident scene is protected, the victim is given first aid or requires removal to a hospital, witnesses are identified and secured, the complainant or victims are interviewed, etc. The pressures of these activities not only necessitate the performance of

many tasks but divide attention as well. In these situations it is not unusual for an officer to be distracted by the confusion and to forget the names of persons to be interviewed or remarks of witnesses. Failure to take notes as the investigation progresses may result in the inability to recall many of the facts. It is the experienced and competent officer who will note his activities, information, evidence or other facts he has uncovered as he proceeds with the investigation. After disposing of all pressing matters, he studies his notations and assembles the pieces to obtain a better insight into the case. *Notes help him to recall additional facts—they may prompt him to re-examine an alibi—to recheck the crime or accident scene—to further question a witness or to open new avenues of investigation.*

An Aid to Interrogation

Occasionally a suspect is arrested in the field and taken to headquarters for interrogation by another officer. A report may not be available and yet the questioning officer must have background information. In such a situation the notebook may provide the necessary information. The arresting officer must not rely solely on his memory. He consults his notebook and briefs the interrogating officer on the facts he recorded at the time of the preliminary investigation, the field inquiry and the arrest. Adequate notes in these circumstances spell the difference between a successful interrogation and failure.

An Aid to Accurate Testimony

Considerable information is usually gathered during the course of an investigation—statements are made, names and addresses are obtained, descriptions are given, measurements are taken, etc. If these findings are not recorded as they are brought to light, they may never be accurately and completely remembered. Furthermore, there is a lapse of time between the end of an investigation and the trial. If testimony were to be based on memory alone, it soon becomes apparent that some details have been forgotten. Testimony based on a lack of information will in turn undermine a case. The court and jury are little impressed by such answers as, "I don't recall," "I'm not sure," "I have forgotten," and "I don't remember." Evidence to establish proof of guilt is difficult enough to obtain without further weakening a case by failing to testify accurately and effectively. Your ability to testify with authority, accuracy and completeness is severely limited if you rely on memory alone—*take notes during the investigation and refer to them when you testify.*

Counteracts Denials or Changes in Statements

The emotional impact of witnessing an incident may lead a person to make spontaneous comments when he is interviewed by the police. Then, after giving the matter some consideration and realizing that he may become involved, he may deny making any remarks, or for some other reason may insist he is being misquoted. The failure of a witness to recall past events accurately will also affect the decisiveness of his testimony. He may forget details or may unknowingly change his conception of what he witnessed or told the police. The officer's notes can help the witness to recall what he said, or can be used to counteract the denials of a reluctant witness or the accused.

When in Doubt — Write it Down

The number of notes required for any one investigation is often a source of concern. Although no specific rule may be established, it is generally accepted that notes must be extensive enough to include all pertinent details. Some officers have solved this problem by recording the information whenever a doubt arises as to whether or not a particular note should be made.

Notes Are Made As Information Is Obtained

When operational procedures are performed as a matter of course they soon become a habit. These functions become second nature to the officer and are performed simply because there is a need for them to be performed. Note taking is no exception. It may be developed into a reflex like reaction by recognizing the need for a written record and following the practice of recording all information as it is obtained. The rewards alone are sufficient to stimulate an interest in note taking. Not only does this practice aid the recall of past events, but it has the immediate effect of improving the clearness, completeness and accuracy of reports submitted to superiors.

Notes must be made at the moment information is gathered. Develop the habit of recording the facts as they are learned and as the evidence is obtained. Any hesitancy, even for a few minutes, may result in the omission of important details. For example, when obtaining a description, enter the information in the notebook as it is given. Reading the notes will assist you to obtain a better mental picture of the suspect and may prompt you to ask for further details which could facilitate identification. Failure to record the information at the moment it is learned may mean a loss of time, or the inability to correct errors, as the witness or victim may leave, be removed from the scene, or even die. Measurements taken at a crime or accident scene must always be recorded as soon as the distances have been determined.

Clarity and Completeness Are Basic to Note Taking

Notebook entries that are too brief, not specific enough or scribbled, lose their value and can actually be used to detract from the credibility of the

writer. The defense may use illegible or inadequate notes which are of no value to the testifying officer to cast suspicion upon their worth or the officer's ability. Notes must be accurate and as complete as possible so that they may be quickly read and understood. They must be written with the understanding that they will become the officer's permanent record and that others may ask to read the contents of the notebook. Use a ball-point pen or fountain pen to insure durability and legibility. It is also advisable for those with poor penmanship to print.

If you consult your notes during a trial, the defense may examine the notebook and will search for entries that will tend to weaken or discredit your testimony. Any irrelevant material may, therefore, be exploited to the fullest extent. Doodling, shopping lists, a first name followed by a telephone number may cause you needless explanation or embarrassment.

The Notebook

A bound or loose-leaf type notebook, about 3 inches, that may be easily carried on the person is found to be the most suitable for field note taking. If a loose-leaf type notebook is used, the six ring binder will prove to be more serviceable, whereas a bound notebook having a hard cover is preferable.

Selecting the type of notebook is largely a matter of choice. A loose-leaf notebook permits the selection of notes required for a particular case. Removing the notes may, however, cause the defense to allege that portions of information favorable to the defendant have been removed. Such accusations may be forestalled by numbering each page consecutively.

A bound notebook offers the added security of knowing that its pages are firmly affixed. It also reduces the challenge to the continuity of the notes as the pages are not removable. In turn the bound

	NOTEBOOK PAGE
95	
4 APRIL 1966 2100 HRS.	DATE-TIME OF CALL
CASE # 66	CASE NUMBER
2530 LAKE ST - 12 TH FLOOR 2105 HRS.	LOCATION-TIME ARRIVED
(C) WILLIAM J. BAILEY	COMPLAINANT-NAME
2530 LAKE ST. 265-5707	ADDRESS-PHONE NUMBER
"C" CALLED POLICE WHEN HE SAW	
W/M ABOUT 23, 5'6", 130-140 LBS.	
BROWN HAIR - BLUE & WHITE SPORT	
SHIRT, TAN PANTS, PARK SHOES.	
NO OTHER DESCRIPTION TRYING	
TO FORCE DOOR OF HSE. NEXT	
DOOR (2532 LAKE)	
(S) PATRICK BASE - 7115 HRS.	SUSPECT-TIME ARRESTED
3060 W. 18 TH ST. NO PHONE	ADDRESS
"S" ANSWERING DESCRIPTION	
FOUND IN ALLEY REAR 2532 -	
SAID HE HAD BEEN DRUNKING	
AND CONFUSED. IN POSSESSION	
OF 1-6" SCREW DRIVER	
AND 12" JIMMY - SAYS HE	
IS APPRENTICE CARPENTER	

notebook may be a source of needless question as the whole notebook must be submitted when the notes are requested for examination.

Whatever notebook is selected, each type is a proven method of maintaining notes for future use. It is the disoriented officer who resorts to jotting notes on slips of paper or any available material. This individual will make notations on folded sheets of paper, index cards or even the inside cover of a book of matches. The limited writing surfaces restrict the quantity and quality of the notes, and the disorganized method of keeping the notes in pockets, or in envelopes, soon make them meaningless—if they are retained at all.

Starting a Notebook

A police officer who misplaces his notebook in a police vehicle, a court room or at the scene of an investigation, etc., may fail to have it returned if it does not contain a means of identification. This problem will, to a degree, be solved if the first entry made on the inside cover or the first page is the owner's name, rank, badge number, address of assignment, and in large department, the division and unit of employment. This entry can be protected by placing a transparent, plastic adhesive strip over it.

Each notebook should also provide a ready reference of telephone numbers that are likely to be used by the officer in the field. They should include, the coroner's office, various court branches, state or municipal prosecutor's office, local firehouse, towing, electrical department and other service agencies and various departmental extension numbers of the detective, juvenile and traffic units. Having ready access to this information can save valuable time when you are conducting an investigation, checking suspects or the conditions of your beat. These telephone numbers may be typed or written on a card the size of a notebook page and either taped or stapled to the inside of the back cover.

Save the Notebook

Filled notebooks should not be discarded but kept for future reference. They may be placed in a box and kept in your personal locker at police headquarters or at home. They should be filed in chronological order. Each notebook should be identified by the first and last case report number it contains, along with the dates of the opening and closing entries.

Note Taking

The extent of the notes to be taken in any one incident will be determined by the assignment and the officer. Generally, notes should be extensive enough to allow the preparation of complete and accurate reports, to help recall when testifying in court and to serve as a reference for some of the police activity performed on a particular day.

Notes should be preferably written on only one side of a page. This is especially important when the loose-leaf type notebook is used and the notes are removed for testifying. Notes must be clearly identified: the page number, the date, time, location, when they were made, the case number, the identification of the parties involved (names, addresses, telephone number, age, sex, race).

A officer should not devise a shorthand system which would be meaningless to anyone else. Entries

must be made with the consideration that others may examine the notes. Common abbreviations which do not affect the comprehension of the material may be used to save space and time. Letters or numerals may be used instead of names to identify the principals after they have been previously identified, e.g., (C) for Complainant, (S) for Suspect, (V) for victim. When more than one suspect or witness is involved, a number may be written after the designating abbreviation to indicate each suspect or witness, (S2) for suspect No. 2. This will not violate the rules of clarity or legibility, as the reader can always refer to the full identification of the subject the first time his name is recorded in the notebook.

When to Take Notes

The majority of the notes will result from interviews. However, notes are also made of incidents or general information which will assist the officer to perform his duty more effectively or to properly recall events at some future time.

WHEN TO TAKE NOTES

ADMINISTRATIVE	INVESTIGATIVE	OPERATIONAL
New Assignments: duties, boundaries, hours, lunch period, starting time	Identifying the Assignment: (a) date, time arrived (b) location of incident (c) weather condition (d) case number	Transportation of Female Prisoners: See Training Key #44
New Procedures and Laws: record briefly change in procedures, regulations, ordinances, statutes, etc.	Statements, Remarks, Admissions: suspects, victim, witness	Wanted Persons: descriptions—who to contact if located.
Special Orders and Directives: uniform change, inspection day, in-service training, firing range, etc.	Crime Scene: Sketch, measurements, other officers present, how crime was committed.	Stolen Property: description of property, autos, appliances, machinery etc.
Vehicle Condition: date, time, nature of damage when reported to supervisor.	Evidence: type, and location found—description and identification	Unusual Beat Conditions: fire, rally, large sporting event, etc.
Court Appearances: date, time, court branch, continuances, trial.	Physical Descriptions: (a) crime or accident scene not sketched (b) victim, suspects (c) automobile, stolen property	Hazardous Conditions: hole in street, damaged light post, teen hang out, etc.
Change in Day Off Schedule:	Service Rendered: (a) first aid (b) transport to hospital	Field Interrogation: location, time, description, reason
Special Events: date, time, location of inquest, grand jury, parades, special events, etc.	Other Agencies Involved: (a) coroner (b) medical (c) other police agencies	Criminal Activity: location, time of occurrence of crimes on beat, M.O. of criminal

Summary:

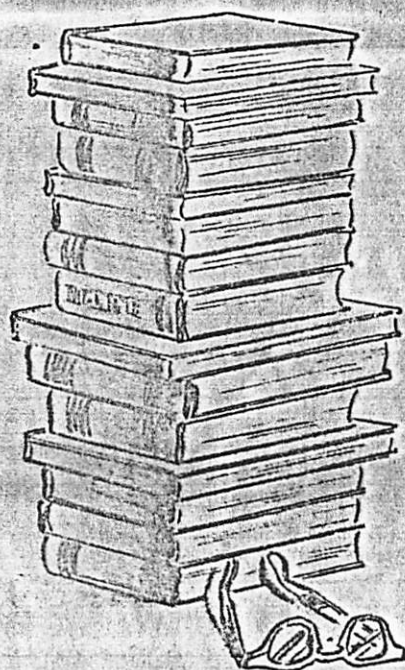
1. Notes are the police officers' official memory.
2. Properly kept notes aid the investigator, the interrogator, court room testimony, and can be used to counteract denials and changes in a story.
3. Notes are made at the time an incident occurs.
4. Clarity and completeness are fundamental to note taking.
5. Entries in the notebook should be properly identified as to the case number, date, time, location, etc.
6. The incident and the officer determine the number of notes that are to be made.

QUESTIONS . . .

The following questions are based upon material in this Training Key. Select the best answer.

1. The best technique an officer can use to recall past events is to
 - a. commit everything to memory.
 - b. use an individualized short hand method to record notes.
 - c. jot down information on slips of paper as they are less bulky to carry.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. none of the above.
2. It may be said that note taking serves the following purposes:
 - a. helps the officer to prepare better reports.
 - b. will assist the officer to recall past events more accurately and completely.
 - c. will furnish background information when a suspect is interrogated.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. none of the above.
3. The following considerations must be given when notes are recorded in a notebook:
 - a. someone else may examine the notebook and question the content.
 - b. months or even years may pass before the notes may be needed to assist the officer to recall the past.
 - c. they become the officer's official memorandum.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. none of the above.
4. The question of how many notes should be taken is often raised by police officers. This question is answered in the following manner:
 - a. the amount will depend upon the case assigned to the officer.
 - b. the notes must contain all the available pertinent information.
 - c. whenever a doubt arises as to whether a note is to be taken, it should be recorded in the notebook.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. none of the above.

HAVE YOU READ . . .



PATROL PROCEDURES. George T. Payton, Legal Book Store, Los Angeles, California, 1964. 304 pp.

Chapter VI, "Field Notetaking and Crime Scene Recording" discusses the proper use of the notebook. It suggests when and what notes to take. This chapter will be found informative to all police officers.

DAILY TRAINING BULLETIN. Vol. 1, Los Angeles Police Department, C. C. Thomas Publishers, Springfield, Illinois, 1963. 274 pp. \$7.50.

Chapter I, "Personal Aids," contains sound practical advice regarding the use of the officer's field notebook. It is evident that the information contained in this chapter was obtained from persons well versed in operational techniques.

TRAINING KEY No. 27, "SKETCHING TECHNIQUES."

This Training Key discusses methods of obtaining measurements and illustrates how an officer can draw a crime scene sketch in his notebook. It also stresses the importance of noting all information accurately.

TRAINING KEY No. 44, "TRANSPORTING PRISONERS."

Every line officer should be familiar with the techniques of reducing false accusations against him when dealing with female prisoners. This Training Key points out the manner in which an officer can take preventive measures by recording his notebook as recorded evidence of his actions.

ANSWERS . . .

1. (d) All of the answers are correct.
2. (d) All of the above answers. These are but a few of the reasons the notes must be legible.
3. (d) All of the answers are correct.
4. (d) All of the answers are correct.

(a) All the answers are false. Memory is the least effective in recalling the past. The notes must always be legible to permit others and the writer to read them. A notebook is the only accepted method of recording notes.

(d) All of the answers are true. It lists several reasons why note taking is so important to effective law enforcement.