



Association of Inspectors General Inspector General Institute® Certified Inspector General Investigator

REPORT WRITING FOR INVESTIGATORS

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Overview

- Why writing matters
- Good news
- Quality standards for reports
- Report Guidelines
- Report Format
- Report Rules
- Advice
- Grammar
- Class Exercise

Learning Objectives

- To understand why it is important for investigators to write well
- To review the standards for well written investigative reports
- To review writing pitfalls, to include grammar & punctuation
- To review appropriate formats for investigative reports
- To analyze a writing sample to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the writing

Why Writing Matters

- Your ability to write well is one of the most important skills of an investigator
- Writing well is a key component to your professional success
- Your written reports is your agency's "calling card" so to speak
- Your agency's credibility often relies upon reports

Good News

- Writing is a skill that can be learned
- There is no substitute for hard work and practice
- You must make it a priority
- If your office has templates to use, please use them, as they can make it easy to meet standards

Quality Standards for Investigative Reports

- Reports must thoroughly address all relevant aspects of the investigation & be complete, logically organized, timely, and objective
- Reports should be accurate, clear, and concise
- Reports should reflect the relevant results of the investigation
- Facts should be presented in straightforward, grammatically correct language
- Avoid ambiguous, obscure, and confusing verbiage

Quality Standards for Investigative Reports (con't)

- Graphics should be well-prepared, clearly relevant to the investigation, and supportive of the presentation
- Don't include unnecessary graphics and images

Quality Standards for Investigative Reports (con't)

- Organizations should use consistent & appropriate report format
- In pursuing this standard, the following guidelines should be considered:
 - The facts should facilitate reader comprehension
 - This should include a clear & concise statement of the facts & applicable law, rule, or regulation that was allegedly violated or that formed the basis for an investigation
 - The principles of good report writing should be followed

Quality Standards for Investigative Reports (con't)

- A quality report will be logically organized, accurate, complete, concise, impartial, and clear
- Reports should be published in a timely manner
- Reports should include exculpatory evidence & relevant mitigating information when obtained during an investigation (Exculpatory evidence in a criminal or civil investigation must be presented to the prosecutor)

Quality Standards for Investigative Reports(con't)

- Evidence outlined in a report should be supported by documentation in the investigative case file
- It may be appropriate to note specific allegations that were not investigated to ensure decision makers can take further action if appropriate
- Document disposition & results of the investigation (fines, savings, recoveries, indictments, convictions, suspensions & debarments, recommendations, etc.)

Report Guidelines

- Use plain language to inform the reader: who, what, when, where, why & how
- Recommend an executive summary that summarizes findings in plain language that the reader easily understands
- Ensure clear & accurate account of the relevant facts (both inculpatory & exculpatory)
- Support your findings with sufficient information & necessary documentation

Report Format

- Report should be in standard format of your office
- Formats will vary depending on the audience or purpose of the report
- For example, a prosecution package will look different from a report for government officials and the public
- When recommending a prosecutor or government official take action, ensure they have everything needed to implement the recommendation

Sample Format of a Report for Prosecution

- Predicate or Introduction (reason for investigation)
- Purpose
- Background Information (standards)
- Details of Investigation (facts developed)
- List of Witnesses and Exhibits
- Consider use of table of contents, glossary and cover page

Format for Comprehensive IG Report

- Predicate or Introduction (reason for review)
- Objectives, Scope and Methodology
- Purpose
- Background (what the reader needs to know to make sense of the report)
- Facts
- Summary of the Findings & Recommendations
- Conclusion and Recommendation (supported by the facts)

Rules to Remember

- Keep it as simple & understandable as possible
- Apply AIG Green Book standards for investigations, which requires a report be written in terms that are “intelligible to informed professionals.”
- Judges, prosecutors or other readers do not know the case the way you do – ensure your investigation and report provides sufficient background information & details of the suspected wrongdoing in clear and simple terms

Rules (con't)

- Do not misrepresent or withhold material information
- Do not inject opinion – only facts
- Tone should be neutral
- Do not introduce new facts in the summary or conclusion
- A smooth, narrative tone is best
- The report should not be a challenge to read

Practical Advice

- Do not reinvent the wheel – agency templates are best
- Proofread and revise your work repeatedly
- Have someone edit for form and substance before publishing
- Have resources to read and refer to (i.e. Strunk & White, *Elements of Style*)
- Purdue OWL is an excellent resource: <https://owl.purdue.edu/>
- The Air Force also has a great writing guide:
https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf_cn/publication/afh33-337/afh33-337.pdf
- Use MS Office spell check & grammar check

Points of Grammar

- Avoid passive voice: Object of the action used as a subject of the sentence
- Examples:
 - Mark threw the ball (4 words)
 - The ball was thrown by Mark (6 words)
- Exception: When the “actor” is unknown or when emphasis needs to be focused on the object of action
 - Example: Reynolds was killed in his office
 - Example: Fraud was committed against the state

Grammar (con't)

- Parallel Structure, which adds clarity, when using lists of two or more ideas or items
 - Non-parallel: Bob likes to jog, enjoys flying, and to watch movies
 - Parallel: Bob likes jogging, flying and watching movies
- Parallel structure adds word patterns, which improves readability
- Useful hints for constructing parallel structure:
 - Figure out what parts of the sentence are being compared
 - Decide whether they are parallel, i.e. arranged or constructed in the same way
 - Make them parallel by making the grammatical construction the same in each part

Grammar (con't)

- Another example:
 - Non-Parallel: John criticized public schools because they are compulsory, funded by the government, and destroy students' humanity
 - Parallel: John criticizes public schools because they are compulsory, government-funded, and normalizing.

Grammar (con't)

- Words (qualifiers) to avoid: very, rather, pretty, little
 - Example: We should all try to do a little better, and be very watchful of this rule because it is rather important, and we are pretty sure that we violate it once in a while.
- Word choice is important!
- “Quite frankly” – (Ugh! -- but not ungrammatical)

Grammar_(con't)

Avoid run-on sentences:

- A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses (also known as complete sentences) are connected improperly
 - Example: I love to write papers I would write one every day if I had the time.
- There are two complete sentences in the above example:
 - Sentence 1: I love to write papers.
 - Sentence 2: I would write one every day if I had the time.

Grammar_(con't)

- Subject verb agreement: Just means both the subject and verb agree – both singular or both plural
 - Singular Examples:
 - John waits for his wife (John waits) v. John wait for his wife
 - I understand the point (I understand) v. I understands the point
 - Cindy likes candy (Cindy likes) v. Cindy like the candy
 - Plural Examples:
 - Birds fly in the sky (Birds fly) v. Bird fly in the sky
 - The dogs bark at the postman (dogs bark) v. The dog bark at...
 - The shoes are too small (shoes are) v. The shoe are too small

Grammar_(con't)

- Pronoun agreement: Pronouns stand in the place of a noun, such as “she” taking the place for “Diane”
 - Examples:
 - Without pronoun: Diane thinks that Diane should sell Diane’s guitar to Diane’s friend.
 - With pronoun: Diane thinks that she should sell her guitar to her friend.
- Pronouns agreement includes the number and gender:
 - Robert’s uncle always compliments his nephew
 - Robert’s uncles always compliments their nephew

Style

- MLA v. APA
 - Modern Language Association is for arts & humanities
 - American Psychological Association (simpler citation format & block quotes for 40+ words)
- Past Tense v. Present Tense
 - “She is...”
 - “She did...”
- First Person v. Third Person
 - Pronouns: He, she, they
 - “He had knowledge of the impending bankruptcy before selling his shares.”
 - “They conspired in the bid-rigging scheme.”

Punctuation

- Common punctuation errors in reports
 - Periods: Typically used as a termination to a sentence – they go inside quotation marks (unlike question marks)
 - Commas: Separates subordinate clauses from main sentence clause
 - Be mindful of the “comma splice” – joining two complete sentences together by a comma.
 - Ex. Bob didn’t like the game, he thought the umpires were biased.
 - Ex. Bob didn’t enjoy the game because he felt the umpires were biased.
 - Question marks: Typically serves as terminal punctuation at end of the sentence.
 - Exception, if using quotation marks, question mark goes inside if part of the quote, otherwise, outside

Punctuation (cont.)

- Common punctuation errors in reports (cont.)
 - Semicolons: Indicates closeness of the connection between two independent clauses & shifts emphasis to the second one.
 - Ex: My children are full of energy on weekends, and they exhaust me.
 - Compare: My children are full of energy on weekends; they exhaust me.
 - Colons: Indicates a list that is usually promised in the independent clause or signals the second sentence explains the first sentence.
 - Ex. I included three critical steps in the investigative plan: conduct witness interviews, review emails, and conduct the subject interview.

Punctuation (cont.)

- Common punctuation errors in reports (cont.)
 - Quotation marks:
 - Commas & periods always go inside quotation marks in American English; dashes, colons, and semicolons almost always go outside quotation marks; questions marks & exclamation marks
 - Run-in quotations are within the sentence and have the same format of the surrounding text.
 - Block quotes are long (40+ words) and typically are separated from surrounding text and may have different line spacing with different font; they are usually a separate paragraph, and don't require quotation marks

Report Review Exercises

- Review of sample report summary
 - Edit for the following:
 - Grammar:
 - Passive v. Active Voice
 - Parallel Structure
 - Pronoun Agreement
 - Subject Verb Agreement
 - Run-on Sentences
 - Third Person Past Tense
 - Spelling, punctuation & grammar



Questions



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