

Report Writing 101

by Todd Olinger

Prior to becoming a police officer, I hadn't written anything on a consistent basis since college. Yes, I wrote an occasional ejection report, but my writing skills left a reader unsatisfied. When I became a police officer, I began writing on a daily basis and developed a consistent method of report writing. Like any task, consistency and proficiency take practice—report writing included. After nearly 15 years of being on the job and writing police reports on a daily basis, report writing has become almost second nature to me. But for those of you who don't have the luxury of writing on a consistent basis; writing a clear, concise, and accurate report can be a daunting, if not challenging task. So if you're one of those individuals whose report writing is limited to the ever so rare ejection report, let's go over a few things that may help you improve your reports.

Similar to a police report, an umpire report is a description of the facts surrounding a particular incident. A well-written factual report plays an important role in describing an incident and assisting those in positions of authority in determining what should or should not happen to the offenders. As a result, it's of utmost importance that an umpire's report is detailed, factual, and easy to read.

Umpires should utilize the appropriate forms and prepare reports in a timely manner that accurately depict or represent the incident in a clear, concise, well-organized, and comprehensive manner. All relevant details should be included and any information elaborating the facts, offering opinions, or providing unnecessary commentary should be avoided.

It's important the reporting umpire utilizes proper wording, grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as terminology consistent with terms used in the rule book, if applicable. Incomplete or improper sentence structure should be avoided as it could lead to confusion or misinterpretation by the reader. Never over or under state the facts and the actions of the involved parties and do not rationalize in order to minimize anyone's involvement in the incident.

Likewise, it's just as important that the reporting umpire doesn't minimize the mistakes or failures made by an individual umpire, umpires, or umpire crew which may have led to the incident. Failure to do so may be interpreted as an inability by the umpire or umpires to accept responsibility for their own actions. A fair and honest evaluation of the incident can't be made if the actions of an umpire or umpires aren't disclosed. Failure to disclose the actions of an umpire and/or his partner(s) could negatively impact the reputation of the umpire or crew and damage the integrity of umpiring as a whole. Remember, with the age of technology and improved capabilities of cellular telephones, everyone on the field is under scrutiny. The last thing any umpire wants is to be found in the "wrong" on video after inaccurately reporting the facts. If the actions of an umpire or umpires aren't detailed, it could lead the reader to believe that someone has something to hide. Let's avoid that by accurately reporting all the facts. Remember, honesty is always the best policy. A properly written and factual report is an umpire's best defense against scrutiny.

When writing your report, try using the following tips to improve your accuracy, effectiveness, and efficiency.

1. Keep it simple. One sentence, one idea. Short sentences are easy to read and understand. The English language dictates that normal sentence structure begins with a noun and ends with a period. Long drawn out sentences can complicate grammar and punctuation, and open the door for sentence errors.
2. Use simple language. Avoid words not used in everyday conversation. An umpire report shouldn't require a Google search to understand. Avoid slang, abbreviations, and unprofessional language. Understand umpire reports are read by college educated individuals most of whom have a graduate degree.
3. Write in properly formed paragraphs by organizing information into groups...what happened, who said what, what actions you took, etc. Proper use of paragraphs makes your report easier to read and understand.
4. A quote is a quote...even if it's rated "R". As offensive as it be, statements made by the offenders or involved parties, including foul or offensive language, should be completely spelled out and quoted in the report. Avoid referring to the f-word or any other obscenity by replacing it with a friendlier sounding version such as "the f-word, f-bomb, and f**k" (or any other representative). Quotes should be accurately referred to, spelled out, and properly punctuated.
5. Open with the basic facts of who, what, when, where, and why. Writing an opening sentence or statement lets the reader know what the report is about before they read in its entirety. Write an opening that includes objective information. For example, *On Monday, January 19, 2015, with 2 outs in the bottom of the 7th inning and the score tied 4-4, State University catcher John Doe (#12) was ejected by home plate umpire Peter Smith for arguing balls and strikes.* This particular statement gives the reader a brief description of what they are about to read. The opening should include the date, inning, score, the person or persons involved and their respective institutions, and a basic description of the incident. Afterwards, write your narrative beginning with a new paragraph.
6. Describe what happened. After the opening statement, write a detailed, accurate, factual, chronological, and thorough narrative of the incident. Use the full names, the uniform numbers, the specific position and/or title, and the respective institution name for anyone referred to in the report, including your partner(s). If you need to describe more than one incident or action taken by more than one individual, use a new paragraph for each incident or individual. Answer the basic facts of who, what, when, where, and why. Include any observations, statements, or details that led to you and/or your partner(s) taking action.

7. Be honest about the role you and/or partner(s) may have played in the incident. Don't omit any information describing the involvement you or your partner(s) may have had even if it reflects poorly upon you. Keep in mind that for the most part video doesn't lie and spectators can make good witnesses. Any information you withhold or inaccurately report could surface later, causing problems for you, your partner(s), your assigner, your coordinator, and your conference. Protect your integrity and the integrity of umpiring by telling the truth, even if it doesn't cast you in the best light.
8. Include information presented to you by your partner(s). Your partner(s) make great eyewitnesses and might be able to provide additional information you're not aware of. Before you write your report, make sure you ask your partner(s) what they may have seen or heard. If need be, write it down or better yet, have them write it down themselves. After writing your report, let your partner(s) proofread it before submitting it. They may have additional information or find mistakes needing corrected.
9. Proof read your report for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Don't rely solely on spell checker to review your report. Make sure you read through it and if need be, let someone else read it. Double check your facts and make sure your report is accurate.
10. Keep a hard copy for your records.
11. Submit your report and verify it was received.

To illustrate the key points of a good report please review this example:

On May 2, 2014, State University Head Coach John Doe (#12) was ejected for arguing balls and strikes.

On May 2, 2014, with 2 outs in the bottom of the 7th inning and the score tied 4-4, I, first base umpire Joe Johnson ejected State University Head Coach John Doe (#12) for arguing balls and strikes after he expressed his disagreement with a check swing call I made.

With a runner at third base and Public University catcher Bill Smith (#25) at bat with a 2-2 count, I was positioned at first base (A position), when home plate umpire David Jones asked for assistance on a check swing. I immediately signaled and verbally indicated "No swing." At that point, State University Head Coach John Doe (#12) yelled from the dugout, "That wasn't even close!" In response, I told Coach Doe to "stop" and held my hand giving him the stop signal. Coach Doe replied by again stating, "That wasn't even close!" In response, I called "Time" and issued Coach Doe a warning for arguing balls and strikes. I also advised home plate umpire David Jones to record the warning.

After the warning, Coach Doe exited the dugout, approached umpire David Jones, and demanded an explanation for why he was warned. Coach Doe also indicated he wanted an explanation for my positioning at the time and expressed why he felt I was not in the proper position to make the call. In response, umpire David Jones reminded Coach Doe of his warning and advised him to return to the dugout. As Coach Doe was returning to the dugout, he turned towards me and stated, "How can you make that call from 95 feet away?" At that point, I ejected Coach Doe from the game for arguing balls and strikes.

After being ejected, Coach Doe began walking in my direction; however he was cut off by third base umpire Bill Smith, who was positioned at 2nd base (B position) at the time of the incident. Umpire Smith warned Coach Doe that if he continued to prolong the ejection by remaining on the field, he would be subject to suspension. In response, Coach Doe exited the playing field without further incident.

Afterwards, the game continued without incident.

This sample report provides a clear and accurate picture of what happened. The basic facts of who, what, when, where, and why are noted and proper writing techniques are utilized. It is short, simple, and to the point, but most importantly tell the entire story.

Have a great season!