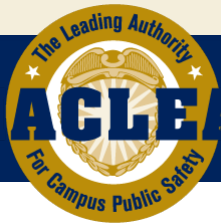
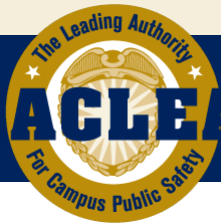


# Report Writing and Use of Language

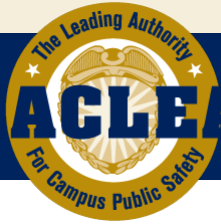


# Report Writing

- One of the most critical tasks for law enforcement/investigators.
- One of the most difficult areas to teach.
- Reports are the most important document in many sexual and gender-based violence cases.
- Reports can be the difference between justice and injustice.
- Inadequate and incomplete reports can have serious consequences.
- A case can be ruined by making assumptions, blaming the victim, and capturing inaccurate information and details.



## Who May See The Report?



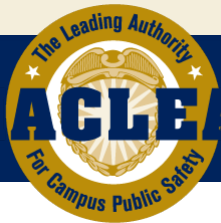
# Report Writing

**Accurate, thorough reports**

**increase victim safety and**

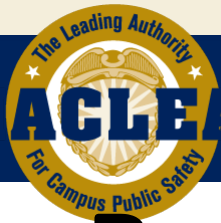
**offender accountability.**

- Assists with safety planning
- Reduces need for victim to testify in court
- Needed information when seeking a protection order
- Documentation that can be used during sentencing
- Provides an account to aid in prosecution



# Report Writing

- **Summarize** all the evidence
- **Recreate** the reality of incident
- **Use** descriptive terms
- **Describe** body parts and actions the victims was forced to do with those parts of the body
- **Describe** the tools, objects, or weapons that were used and how they were used



# Report Writing

## Strong reports should :

- Be objective
- Include details of the events
- Use the victim's language
- Include direct quotes from the victim and involved parties
- Have detailed descriptions of the assault location, injuries, acts committed, and everything the victim reports occurring.



# Report Writing

## Strong reports should include:

- Behavior of the perpetrator
  - premeditation, grooming, coercion, threats, and force
- Traumatic reaction of the victim
  - before, during, and after the assault
- What the victim thought, felt, and feared
- What victim observed
  - see, smell, taste, hear and touch
- Victim's condition
  - Physical (Note visible injuries, victim reported unseen injuries)
  - Emotional (fight, flight or freeze response)

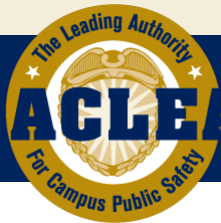


# Report Writing

Reports ***should not*** include:

- Opinions, hunches, gut feelings
- Vague quantitative words (*for example: a lot, lots, many, some*)
- Victim blaming statements
- Subjective non-descriptive terms (*acted strange, seemed upset, not normal*)

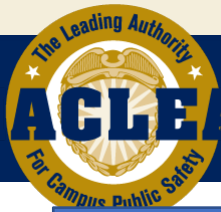




# Report Writing

Reports *should not* include:

- Police jargon
- Consensual language or words depicting mutual participation (*ex., made love, had sexual intercourse, engaged in oral sex*)
- Terms of affection (*ex., hugged, cuddled, caressed*)
- Sanitized or cleaned-up language if not used by the victim
- Terms that minimize the incident

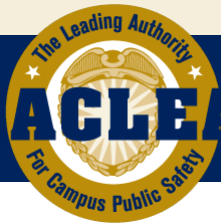


## Problematic Language

- Private family matter
- “peeping tom”
- Date rape
- Victim-less prosecution

## Correct Terminology

- Domestic violence
- Stalker/sexual predator
- Non-stranger assault
- Evidence-based



# Report Review

Qualifying words characterize and convey a message.

Consider these terms – what do they convey?

- *violent* rape
- *innocent* victim
- *alleged* victim
- victim's *story*



## Connotation?

- Victim's story
- Victim "had sex with"
- Consented
- Uncooperative victim

## Better choice

- Victim's account
- Suspect (then list the *actions/behaviors*)
- Submitted
- Reluctant victim



# Problematic Language in Reports

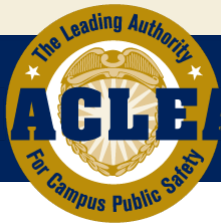
- Erotic or affectionate characterization of assaults
- How resistance or questionable actions taken by the victim are characterized
- Attributing the “good” character of the offender
- Grammatically omitting or minimizing the suspect as the focus of the assault
- Cop speak



# Problematic Language

## **How resistance or questionable actions taken by the victim are characterized**

- Victim stated she didn't do anything to stop him.
- Victim never made any attempt to scream or get away.
- Victim willingly drank alcohol with him.
- Victim never called the police after the alleged attack (delayed reporting).



# Problematic Language

## **Good Character of the Offender**

- Smith was polite and calm during the interview.
- He said he would never hurt a woman.
- Smith indicated that Victim is bi-polar and off her medications.
- Smith promised he would take care of her so we would not have to come back out.



# Problematic Language

**Grammatically omitting or minimizing the suspect as the focus of the assault**

- Victim was assaulted.
- The woman said she is a victim of abuse.
- She said he is never violent unless he drinks.





# Problematic Language

## **“Cop Speak”**

- Suspect exited the vehicle and proceeded...
- Oral Copulation
- Digital penetration



# Strategy

**Avoid the erotic or affectionate characterization of sexual assault**

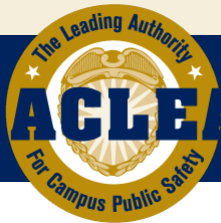
- Use appropriate verbs and descriptions:
  - “Raped” or “Sodomized” (instead of “had sex with” or “made love with...”)



# Strategy

**Include the use of force and violence in your reports (and testimony). Use of vivid verbs can be helpful.**

- Suspect **clamped** his mouth onto victim's and **forced** his tongue into her mouth...
- Suspect **shoved** his penis into her vagina and **raped** her...



# Strategy

**Be able to articulate lack of resistance or “questionable” actions by victims.**

- Articulate victim fears
- Understand **why** victim didn't report initially – try to capture that in writing your report
- Be descriptive and honest about drug and alcohol use



# Strategy

**Avoid the “good character” effect of suspect or suspect’s efforts to blame victim**

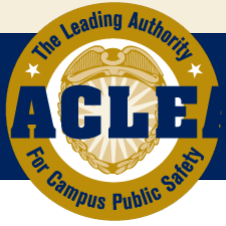
- Understand suspects “M.O.”
- Recognize efforts to charm and/or manipulate you
- Suspects will try to get you “on their side”



# Strategy

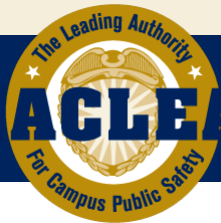
**Avoid grammatically omitting or minimizing the suspect as the focus of the assault**

- NAME the suspect and keep that person as the SUBJECT (action-taker) in your reports and testimony.
- "Bob Smith raped his girlfriend during the argument..."



# Group activity

- Instructions:
  - Designate a group leader and someone to take notes
  - Read the report and answer the following questions:



1. What is your overall reaction to this report? Thoughts?
2. What did this officer do well in this report?
3. What additional information do you want to know?
4. In terms of how sexual assault is handled here, who are you going to be notifying and what information will you provide?
5. What sentences/elements of this report are not necessarily trauma-informed/potentially biased?
6. How could you have handled this differently? (Hint – the second to last paragraph starting with “Early Sunday morning...”)
7. Name one realistic reporting change that can be implemented in your department.





# Questions



# Thank you!

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