

A PRIMER FOR NOTES

1. Notes are impartial observations reduced to writing in ink. Note the time.
2. Notes should be created as soon as possible after your observation.
3. Your notes may be read aloud in Court: precision is your goal and avoid slang.
4. Tell what, who, when, where, and how often, how big, how fast, or other specific descriptors. Omit vague words. Seek out concrete words, not abstract or fuzzy.
5. Your opinions, editorializing, and conclusions are not wanted. They will diminish the value of your notes and you will be revealed as not impartial.
6. When transcribing word for word conversations, have a strict policy of using quotation marks. Attribute to a speaker or a source.
7. Take the time required to complete notes before moving to the next task, even if it means advising others you are busy.
8. Record all your actions. Use standard abbreviations when asking the same routine questions. Be able to swear in Court: "I follow the same procedures each time I take notes". "I routinely do or ask, or check...abc".
9. Record contradictory statements, events, or observations that seem out of place or inconsistent with what you saw earlier. If you see something that perplexes you, write it down: there may be an explanation. This habit of forced impartiality will have you looking at the familiar in a different way, discovering important facts or lead other investigators to valuable discoveries.
10. Ask open ended questions. Avoid asking questions that indicate that you have already formed an opinion. You may have misunderstood or be mistaken or did not see something others involved have taken for granted.
11. Read your notes before you submit them. Always proof your work: it is your reputation—guard it. Once you lose the aura of impartiality, it is hard to get back the glow of respect. Caution. Circumspect. Care = See See See!
12. If possible use sketches or diagrams. Refer to physical landmarks that will not move in months or years. Orient your notes i.e. "north" "river".

13. If possible use audio/video equipment, or photographs.
14. Often some context, some brief history will assist as you may be called to explain to a Judge some years after your observations were made.
15. Think: “if this was my life hanging in the balance scales, what is necessary from my observations that best shows to be an impartial decision maker what happened.”
16. Relax: no one expects you to be a perfect note taker. Conscientious competence is all the law requires.

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