Basic Principles of Good Report Writing
(Adapted from NEO, Principles of Investigation, Bureau of Quality Assurance, March 2000 and Esrael 2005)

Accuracy
☐ Report factual information – e.g., “I saw.”
☐ Report information gained from the physical senses – e.g., sight, smell, taste, auditory, and touch.
☐ Be aware of feelings that may destroy objective descriptions. Strong feelings can cause the writer to seek evidence to support her feelings and reject evidence that does not support them.
☐ Make distinctions between fact and hearsay, fact and opinion, and fact and conclusions.
☐ Be clear about the meaning of words; avoid jargon.
☐ Clarify all abbreviations, such as SOB for shortness of breath.
☐ Proofread the report and rewrite as needed.

FACT vs. HEARSAY
- A fact is information learned through the use of the investigator’s own senses or corroborated by information the investigation obtains.
- Statements from other persons, even witnesses, are hearsay.
- Hearsay is generally admissible in administrative hearings and should not be ignored. Corroborate hearsay if possible.

FACT vs. CONCLUSION
- A fact proves itself while a conclusion requires collaborative evidence.
- A fact exists independently of the observer, while a conclusion exists only in the mind of the observer.
- A fact is observable, while a conclusion is reasoned.
- A conclusion involves drawing an inference that looks like the logical consequence of preceding presuppositions, information, or evidence.

FACT vs. OPINION
- Fact has the quality of being independent and can be confirmed or substantiated.
- Opinion is an idea, an impression, or a notion resulting from a personal sentiment.
- Opinions are not a part of the main body of a report.
Basic Principles of Good Report Writing
(Adapted from NEO, Principles of Investigation, Bureau of Quality Assurance, March 2000 and Esrael 2005)

Completeness
□ Completeness is achieved by reporting all the facts discovered during the course of an investigation.
□ When in doubt, include the information. Information that appears irrelevant to the investigator may be relevant to the reviewer.
□ In most cases, the only information the reader will have will be the information in the report.
□ Partially stated facts can be misleading and misinterpreted.
□ Explain why certain information is lacking or incomplete.
□ Provide a detailed explanation of the possible source of additional information and undeveloped leads.

Conciseness
□ Avoid unrelated, extraneous, incidental, and nonessential information and detail.
□ Pay attention to grammar.
□ Avoid adjectives, wit, sarcasm, flowery expressions, and repetition. A report is not a literary or creative writing exercise.
□ Use singleness of thought and purpose. A good report will give the reader a clear idea or picture of the investigation.
□ Use headings, paragraphing, sentence structure, indentations, underlining, and capitalization to emphasize and give weight and/or visibility to information the investigator deems more important.

Impartiality/Objectivity
□ The investigator is a fact finder. Report the material and evidentiary facts without addition or subtraction.
□ Do not conceal or withhold information.
□ Do not assume.
□ Do not conclude.
□ Maintain an unbiased and open mind about the case.
Basic Principles of Good Report Writing
(Adapted from NEO, Principles of Investigation, Bureau of Quality Assurance, March 2000 and Esrael 2005)

☐ Avoid formulating preconceived ideas about the guilt of the accused.
☐ Avoid becoming emotionally involved in the process of seeking information.

Clarity and Report Formatting
☐ Arrange the contents of the report in discrete sections to facilitate the reader’s review and understanding of the report.
☐ Write in chronological order.
☐ Avoid ambiguous sentences and vague statements.
☐ Additional parts of the complete report may include the title page, information on undeveloped leads, investigator’s conclusions, witness list, and exhibit/evidence list.