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Documenting Use of Force

Members shall adhere to the following when documenting a use of force in an incident report or witness statement:

1. Establish the core transaction:

- A core transaction is when a police officer makes a lawful detention or an arrest.
- Describe the reasonable suspicion or probable cause that preceded the lawful detention or arrest.

2. Establish why force was used. Penal Code 835 (a) allows officers to use force to:

- effect an arrest,
- prevent escape,
- overcome resistance,
- defend oneself, and/or
- defend another

Members should articulate the suspect's action causing the member to use force. Was the suspect actively resisting? Was the suspect trying to escape? Was someone in immediate danger?

3. When determining whether the level of force used was reasonable and appropriate, the courts look at:

- the seriousness of the crime
- whether the suspect was actively trying to escape or resist
- the immediate danger to anyone

4. Describe the type and amount of force used:

- use plain English and avoid using jargon,
- be specific about the type of force used (palm strike, fist strike, baton strike, bent wrist control, carotid restraint, etc.),
- be specific about the amount of force used (number of strikes, length of time force applied, etc.),
- be specific about the location where the force was applied to subject (face, chest, thigh, etc.), and
- document the affect the force had on the subject.

5. Documenting member's use of personal body weapons:

- describe the specific personal body weapon used (hands, fist, feet, knees, etc.),
- document the location where the force was applied on the subject's body, and
- **do not** use the terms "Zone 1" or "Zone 2" when documenting the use of personal body weapons.

6. Documenting member's use of impact weapons:

- describe the specific impact weapon used (26" baton, collapsible baton, etc.)
- use the terms Zone 1 and Zone 2 to describe the intended impact weapon strike zone(s) to a subject(s)
- additionally, include the actual body part struck with the impact weapon, if known.

The terms Zone 1 and Zone 2 shall not be used to describe force options applications other than impact weapon strikes.

7. Clarifications on Use of Force Terminology:

- The terms "distraction strike" and "distraction blow" are not acceptable language when describing a use of force incident.
- An example of an **inappropriate** description of an officer's use of force designed to distract a suspect: "I delivered two distraction strikes to zone one of (B) Jones." In this case the officer did not describe the suspect's actions or articulate the reason for using the force, did not articulate whether the officer used a personal body weapon and type or an impact weapon and type, and did not articulate the specific part of the suspect's body that was hit. Additionally, if the officer used a personal body weapon, the officer should not use the term "zone one."
- An example of an **appropriate** description of an officer's use of force designed to distract a suspect: "I used a left palm strike to the suspect's forehead to **distract** him from strangling the victim. I then lunged forward and wrapped my arms around the suspect's waist, while simultaneously driving with my legs, tackling him to the ground." In this case, the officer used the palm strike to stop the suspect from injuring another person. The officer also used the strike to set up the use of another technique.

Members should refer to DGO 5.01, Use of Force, for procedures on reporting, notifying and investigating use of force incidents. **Sergeants and Lieutenants shall not approve any incident report/written statement involving a use of force that does not comply with the above procedures.**

Members should direct any questions about documenting use of force to the San Francisco Police Academy PT/DT staff (415) 401-4633.


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Chief of Police