



*Review Article*

## **FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO REPORT WRITING PROFICIENCY IN AMERICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT: A THEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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**Abstract: Purpose:** This thematic literature review explores the critical role of competent writing skills in law enforcement, examining its impact on career progression, agency reputation, and legal proceedings. The purpose is to synthesize existing literature to identify research gaps and suggest directions for future studies. **Methods:** Google Scholar, ERIC, and the Jerry Falwell Library searches were conducted to capture a broad range of studies involving police report writing, its impact on officers, law enforcement agencies, and the criminal justice system, and writing improvement strategies. Although not required for this review, the work followed PRISMA-ScR guidelines. **Results:** The initial search yielded numerous qualitative and quantitative studies. This review categorizes the findings into themes of the importance of writing proficiency, the influence of organizational culture, training and education, and technological integration, highlighting the variability and scope of the existing literature. **Conclusions:** The review shows the need for well-structured research to substantiate the factors contributing to effective law enforcement report writing. It recommends areas for in-depth exploration in future systematic reviews or primary studies, especially longitudinal studies on the effects of targeted training programs, organizational culture shifts, and technological integration on writing proficiency. **Application in Law Enforcement:** For trainers and instructors, integrating comprehensive report writing programs into training for law enforcement officers can enhance professional skills and accountability. Effective report writing improves documentation accuracy, supports legal proceedings, and enhances career progression. Incorporating targeted report writing training can holistically enhance the performance and professionalism of law enforcement officers.

**Keywords:** report writing, police officer training, writing strategies, culture, law enforcement



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## **Introduction**

This thematic literature review shows that police report writing is a complex process influenced by organizational cultures, individual characteristics, and training methodologies. It encompasses theoretical perspectives such as Engeström's activity systems theory [1] and Leontiev's concepts [2], which offer insights into the complexities of effective police report writing. These frameworks underscore the importance of understanding the interplay between individual officers, organizational structures, and the broader socio-cultural context within which officers produce police reports.

Furthermore, this work examines the significance of competent writing in law enforcement and highlights its implications for professional development, professional reputation, and the administration of justice. Studies show the role of writing proficiency in shaping officers' reputations, influencing trial outcomes, and ensuring accurate documentation of law enforcement activities [3]. Additionally, factors such as self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and attitudes toward writing are critical determinants of writing competence among law enforcement officers [4].

Engeström's and Leontiev's works offer valuable frameworks for understanding the complexities involved in effective police report writing. For example, Engeström discusses the interconnectedness of various elements within a system and how they interact to achieve a shared goal. In the context of police report writing, Engeström's theory suggests that effective communication relies not only on individual officers' writing skills but also on the broader activity system within which they operate (i.e., organizational culture, available resources, and the nature of police work itself). On the other hand, Leontiev attests to the role of activity in shaping individual cognition and behavior. For example, Leontiev emphasizes the importance of

understanding the specific tasks and goals involved in the writing process and the socio-cultural context in which officers operate. By considering Engeström's and Leontiev's theories, law enforcement agencies can develop more comprehensive and rigorous report-writing training programs and support systems to enhance officers' writing proficiency, leading to more accurate, clear, and effective reporting of law enforcement activities.

The purpose of this thematic literature review is (i) to consider the factors influencing effective report writing in law enforcement, (ii) to assess the professional and psychological benefits of proficient report writing, (iii) to evaluate the impact of organizational culture and training methodologies on report writing skills, and (iv) to identify research gaps and potential future studies relevant to improving report writing proficiency among law enforcement officers.

## **METHODS**

A literature review was appropriate to meet the objectives of this study and answer the research question: What factors contribute to effective law enforcement report writing proficiency, and what are their implications? This study's protocol was developed using the thematic literature review methodological framework. The protocol consisted of a series of five stages: (i) setting the research question, (ii) searching the literature, (iii) sampling, (iv) determination of quality, (v) data extraction, and (vi) thematic synthesis. Also included were the search strategy details and the review process steps as follows:

1. **Identifying and Collecting Relevant Studies:** Literature searches were conducted across three electronic bibliographic databases: Google Scholar, ERIC, and the Jerry Falwell Library. An initial search using the search terms "law enforcement report writing," "police training," "writing proficiency," "organizational culture," "professional development," and "technology integration" was conducted. This search established salient parameters and eight key search terms for additional database searches. Those eight critical terms included:

(i) law enforcement report writing, (ii) police training and writing, (iii) writing proficiency in law enforcement, (iv) police organizational culture, (v) writing skill development in law enforcement, (vi) technology in police report writing, (vii) impact of report writing on legal outcomes; and (viii) professional development through writing. The collected literature was then screened for relevance to the research question. After removing duplicates, studies were assessed for eligibility. Reference lists of eligible studies were further screened for additional relevant studies.

2. **Study Selection:** Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to filter and guide searches for relevant literature. To be included, literature from searches had to meet four inclusion criteria: (i) be from a peer-reviewed journal, a conference presentation, or a published thesis; (ii) published in the English language; (iii) include documented interventions or analysis related to law enforcement report writing or general writing proficiency; and (iv) be quantitative or qualitative. The literature was not restricted by time frame, study population, geographical publication, or type/design of journal article. Collected literature that did not meet all criteria was excluded. The conflicting literature was analyzed to determine inclusion. By applying the eligibility criteria, the articles were screened for selection. Triangulation was applied at this stage to mitigate potential bias. Initially, articles were selected from the title and abstract screening. A second, more in-depth selection was then conducted through full-text screening. December 3, 2023, was the last date that the search was executed.
3. **Charting the Data:** Once included articles were selected, data was extracted and charted according to author, title, journal, publication year, geographical location, purpose, sample size and type, methodology, intervention type, outcomes, key findings, and barriers. One author extracted and grouped the data, and another validated the data to ensure accuracy.

Data were organized and grouped into subtopics according to the identified study purposes: (i) factors influencing report writing proficiency, (ii) training methodologies, (iii) organizational culture and its impact on writing, (iv) technological tools in report writing, (v) professional development through report writing, and ( i) challenges and future directions in law enforcement report writing.

4. **Summarizing and Synthesizing the Results:** The author collectively compared the charted data. Descriptive statistics were performed to characterize the research literature and identify the breadth and gaps. Trends across geographic locations and decades of publication of included studies were evaluated. The study results were examined within each thematic area to determine trends and commonalities. Barriers and gaps were identified within the literature to suggest future areas of study.

In addition to the thematic literature review methodological framework, the author for this review followed the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist. However, doing so was not required for this type of review. No risk of bias assessment, summary measures, or additional analyses were conducted in this thematic literature review following the PRISMA-ScR. No formal review protocol exists.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Competent writing skills are integral to law enforcement, impacting career progression, agency reputation, and legal proceedings. Supervisors and legal professionals often favor officers with solid writing abilities, as clear and accurate reports play a crucial role in documenting events and supporting law enforcement events and actions. However, achieving writing proficiency requires more than technical skills, as self-efficacy, motivation, and attitudes influence writing effectiveness. A cultural shift within law enforcement agencies emphasizing the importance of proficient writing and diversity can foster professionalism and accountability

in report writing. Additionally, modifications to training curricula to include targeted writing instruction are essential for enhancing officers' skills. Strategies such as standardized templates and writing assistance technology can further support writing proficiency. Moreover, fostering self-regulation and understanding writing development dynamics are critical for sustained improvement. Ultimately, a comprehensive approach encompassing organizational support, targeted training, and cultural change is necessary to enhance report writing effectiveness in law enforcement.

While research on writing proficiency in law enforcement is limited, extensive literature and research on writing competently and strategies exist. This review will examine the significance of competent writing in shaping an officer's professional development, the reputation of a police report's author, the importance and outcomes of reports, and their impact on the officer, their agency, and the criminal justice system. It will explore the factors influencing police reports, including the qualities of law enforcement officers, police culture, and training, and how these aspects shape an officer's entry into law enforcement and report-writing skills development. Finally, this review discusses how the literature may contribute to a cultural shift, propose strategies, and address gaps in writing proficiency within law enforcement, and emerging trends and future challenges in police report writing, such as the integration of technology, evolving legal requirements, and the increasing emphasis on transparency and accountability. By addressing these challenges and leveraging emerging trends, law enforcement agencies can adapt and enhance their report-writing practices to meet the evolving needs of the criminal justice system.

### *Competent Writing Importance*

Law enforcement reports have great weight, and a lack of writing proficiency in law enforcement is significant to careers, agencies, and jurisprudence. One study asserts that

people who do not learn to write well are disadvantaged professionally because writing is a gateway to employment and promotion [5]. Law enforcement officers with the reputation of having excellent writing skills are well-received by supervisors, district attorneys, judges, and others who may read their written products [6]. The goal of a law enforcement report is to chronicle an event, capturing the elements of an alleged crime, collection of evidence, and interviews of complainants, witnesses, and suspects. The law enforcement report supports actions taken or not taken by law enforcement officials and can influence the outcome of trials [7].

Self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and attitudes are critical in competent writing [8]. Specific motivational constructs routinely used as outcomes in law enforcement report writing are often measured by how an officer believes in their ability to write an effective report, their motivation to write polished reports because of an inherent satisfaction to do so, and how they think and feel about report writing. Writing skills can be measured holistically by ranking compositions without listing their linguistic, rhetorical, or information features and viewing compositions as collections of these features [9]. In a police report writing context, supervisors, and administrators can assess writing competence by ranking rank-and-file reports based on how well they're written, if they capture the elements of a crime, and paint a full picture of an incident rather than breaking down specific parts like language or structure.

### *Professional Development*

Writing proficiency and linguistic flexibility, or the willingness to change language use, are interconnected, and linguistically flexible people tend to be better writers [10]. Language choice, style, and flow are components of linguistic flexibility and can be applied to police reports, although some in law enforcement might view doing so as outside the norm. Law enforcement officers can spend hundreds of hours training by attending mandatory continuing



education classes. Additionally, some officers pay for their training to learn subjects vital to them, and some officers even go through formal continuing education, such as attending an institution of higher learning.

Officers attending college often recognize the importance of being well-rounded and take classes that improve their station in life or their profession. While many colleges claim to be writing-centric, the effectiveness of institutions in developing writing could be better. Recent college graduates' writing proficiency is their most significant deficit [11]. Still, there is evidence that academic writing skill development may be lacking. One study examined the Elgin Community College's (ECC) Police Education Delivery System (PEDS), an application that combines learning outcomes of ECC's criminal justice classes and police academy training courses [12]. The PEDS model has six fundamental principles, and communication – specifically written communication - is one of these principles. Martin's examination of PEDS showed that although police academy recruits train in report writing, the training is inadequate to develop proper writing skills, and more than just basic academy training is needed to have better writing officers.

### *Professional Reputation*

One of the most critical professional currencies to a law enforcement officer is their reputation. Personally or professionally, an officer's reputation will follow them throughout their career. Police reports are public records, and they can have the potential of making their way to the United States Supreme Court such as landmark law enforcement cases [13, 14, 15], *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), *Carroll v. United States* (1925), *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961), and *Terry v. Ohio* (1967). Today, technology and transparency make open records requests to obtain police reports easy. Poorly written reports can embarrass the officer and an officer's employing

agency, which can have severe political ramifications for the officer and senior leaders [16]. Officers must write competently because doing otherwise can hurt an officer's career.

One study shows that poor writing skills profoundly impact an individual's professional reputation [17]. The impact can be multifaceted because the world is interconnected and information-driven. Effective writing is vital when conveying ideas, determining credibility, and nurturing professional relationships. Accordingly, individuals with inadequate writing proficiency may struggle to communicate their thoughts clearly and persuasively, often leading to misunderstandings, misapprehensions, and a diminished perception of competence [18]. Moreover, poorly written documents, such as reports, can reflect negatively on one's due attention to detail, professionalism, and overall competence [19]. As a result, trust erodes, as does others' confidence in an author's abilities. The inability to communicate effectively through writing can harshly delay career advancement and opportunities in fields where written communication is central, such as academia, journalism, or law [20]. Therefore, while law enforcement officers are experts in their field, proficient writing is equally indispensable for cultivating a positive professional reputation and achieving success on the streets and in the courtroom.

### *Significance of Police Reports*

Police reports still play a crucial role in the administration of justice despite technologies like body-worn cameras (BWC) and in-car camera systems because they augment visual records of an incident, which can have significant police accountability implications. For example, administrators might seek to compare written reports with a digital recording to ensure that officers practice objectivity during a police encounter by matching reports to a visual accounting of that encounter. For line officers, succinct, transitory reports might be factually accurate, but they might also omit information that could appear deceptive or serve to trigger false

accusations [21]. Therefore, although visual recordings play a major role in documenting police encounters, the written recording of an incident can strengthen or weaken an officer's account of the enforcement actions they took during that incident.

Police reports are a specific data source produced under specific conditions in which cognitive bias and memory impressionability likely determine written quality, indicating subjectivity [22]. For example, a critical incident involving a life-threatening situation would likely impact an officer's physical and mental functionality. Because police reports can be categorized by impact typologies, factors such as criminal acts or police officers' roles and mindsets are worth noting. Therefore, practitioners and scholars should consider examining police reports as a research topic and explore the factors affecting written reports' content and quality [23].

### *Influence Outcomes and Goals*

People write to persuade, inform, or narrate [24]. Writing also assists in recalling, arranging, examining, deciphering, and constructing knowledge across different subject matters. Writing is a powerful skill that influences people and outcomes. Martin Luther's 95 Theses [25] ignited a religious revolution, while Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* [26] is used as a tactics bible for soldiers and businesspeople.

Writing can be so powerfully persuasive that religions and governments, throughout history, have banned books and prosecuted their authors. One study conducted a writing-centric meta-analysis of writing instruction and determined that writing about content material enhanced learning [27]. Writing is also easily archived, so books, articles, thoughts, and ideas are available. Writing and learning go together because writing is a vehicle for delivering information [28]. Law enforcement reports also persuade, inform, and narrate. Police reports

are designed to document the facts of an incident, give investigators and prosecutors information to pursue leads, and can affect a person's freedom on the streets or in court [29].

### *Factors That Influence Police Reports*

There are many personal and professional influences on police report writing. Writing outcomes and development are developmental processes metered by persistence, self-regulation, and self-efficacy [30, 31]. This suggests that a law enforcement officer's personal qualities, prior experience, education, and indoctrination to police work are critical to their writing development.

Police culture depicts crime-ridden streets with drug deals on one corner and the ladies of the night on the other as a police officer's salient environment. Television shows and movies often depict the exciting part of police work, such as vehicle pursuits, shootouts, and making significant arrests. At the same time, report writing is often vilified as a necessary evil. The aforementioned is understandable since the police are supposed to arrest criminals; however, officers do not regard performing administrative duties, such as report-writing, well, and this cultural attitude cascades to police educators who concentrate curricula design on classes like force-on-force training, arrest and control, and physical readiness – all imminently necessary police skills and competencies. Personal and professional factors affect an officer's report writing through individual or systemic reinforcement or destabilization of report writing training.

### *Qualities of a Law Enforcement Officer*

Law enforcement agencies have minimum standards that applicants must meet to select the most qualified applicants. These standards promise a workforce with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the essential functions of police work. A RAND Corporation study [33] showed that common hiring standards included having a high school diploma or equivalent, being a U.S. citizen, possessing a driver's license, having a relatively blemish-free criminal

history, and passing a battery of physical, psychological, and medical tests. Although applicants who successfully navigate the selection process are considered quality candidates in terms of character, there is no marker to indicate whether they will be skillful in the rigors of proficient writing.

People generally pursue law enforcement careers because they are results-oriented and action-driven [34]. Police officers see themselves as sheepdogs watching for the wolf. When they wear their uniforms and strap their gun belts, police officers can metaphorically envision themselves as warrior guardians, not literary novelists, exacerbating one of the least favorite components of police work [35].

### *Police Culture*

Law enforcement officers at the line level regard effecting arrests on the streets as an indicator of a good cop, thus perpetuating an organizational culture that celebrates the exciting aspects of the job [36]. The aforementioned seems logical since there is a perception that good guys put bad guys in jail. It is also logical to assume that because this culture exists, post-arrest activities, such as writing a report or booking evidence, are viewed as administrative duties better suited for support staff than gunfighters.

One research studied law enforcement language and the far-reaching implications of police reports. It concluded that law enforcement-specific language, plus internal and external factors - such as supervisory preferences, formal education, training, and culture – are all interrelated to proficient report writing [37]. Moreover, police culture contributes to the lack of writing proficiency because of historical writing mechanics such as jargon, writing in the third person, and using the passive voice [38]. Culture is a typical business driver, and whatever product a business manufactures typically reflects its culture; Police work and police work products are no different.

### *Professional Training*

Basic and post-academy training also contribute to law enforcement officers' need for more writing proficiency. Police academies across the U.S. instruct their cadets to document facts, collect evidence, and conduct interviews [39]. Academy curricula typically do not cover the rules of grammar, punctuation, syntax, and flow of written reports.

Post-Academy training, or continuing education or in-service training, provides additional learning opportunities for new and veteran officers [40]. However, post-academy curricula focus on an officer's perishable skills, like firearms proficiency, less-lethal force options, defensive tactics, and case law updates. Like basic police training, post-academy training spends little time on report writing or writing mechanics. So, veteran officers are left to train newer officers the same way they were trained, perpetuating a lack of writing proficiency seen in some police reports.

### *How the Literature Might Help*

Drawing upon relevant literature works can greatly enhance police report writing through a transformative cultural shift and targeted strategies. For example, one study [41] suggests that promoting a continuous learning culture and championing improvement within law enforcement agencies are critical for fostering effective writing practices. By integrating writing proficiency into an organization's mission and vision, officers are more likely to recognize the importance of clear, accurate documentation and energetically seek opportunities to enhance their writing skills [42]. Strategies such as providing comprehensive writing training, constructive feedback from peers and supervisors, and implementing standardized templates can help promote writing proficiency and ensure consistency across reports [43]. Additionally, leveraging technology tools such as spelling and grammar checkers can aid officers in overcoming individual writing issues and encourage polished, well-written reports [44].

Ultimately, reconciling writing gaps requires a multi-faceted approach, combining organizational support, targeted training, and technological solutions to empower officers in constructing and delivering high-quality, professional police reports.

One piece of research postulates that understanding writing development requires more work, "It is like an unfinished painting, with some parts of the canvas more completely realized than others [45]." In addition, the research discussed that even though an author's writing development is not fully known, adjustments within the writer themselves are drivers of writing development. Acknowledging that change is needed and accepting new writing ideas is essential to reconciling any lack of writing proficiency.

To better understand writing development, knowing what writing skills require is essential. Writing is a goal-directed and self-sustained cognitive activity [46]. Writing requires a delicate balance of writing environment, topic constraints, author intentions, and writing composition knowledge, skills, and abilities. Writing also has a social component, meaning it has a symbiotic relationship with a reader, community, and audience. A police officer's audience is everyone, and they have a new canvas each time they respond to a call for service or after they complete certain police duties.

### *Writing Improvement Strategies*

Adopting effective writing improvement strategies enhances an officer's report-writing skills. Writing training sessions focusing on clarity, conciseness, and accuracy can significantly enhance an officer's writing proficiency [47]. In addition, routine constructive feedback from peers or supervisors and regular opportunities for officers to practice writing reinforce learning and facilitate skill development [48]. Also, as previously mentioned, having standardized report templates and guidelines can simplify the writing process and ensure document consistency [49]. By implementing these evidence-based strategies and leveraging writing assistance

technology tools, law enforcement agencies can empower officers to produce high-quality, professional reports that accurately document law enforcement activities [50].

As discussed, evidence exists to support the importance of specific writing strategies. Along with the strategies discussed above, formulating a writing plan, accepting the possibility of revisions, and essential mechanics such as adhering to grammar rules, sentence structure, and cadence play a holistic role in improving writing proficiency [51]. In addition, understanding foundational factors that contribute to effective writing is critical to a multifaceted approach to better writing. For example, learning about genre knowledge is an essential part of writing development [52], as is the role of motivation [53]. Although motivation is generally supported, better-skilled writers are more motivated than lesser-skilled ones [54]. Working and living together in synchronicity, in the context of writing and holistic police work, while employing many writing improvement strategies, might help some officers become better writers.

Explicit and interactive learning can help improve writing skills. Self-regulation is a critical writing improvement strategy in goal-setting, self-assessment, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement [55]. Law enforcement officers who struggle with writing can leverage training available to them through technology, their departments, and local colleges to help them improve as writers. Ultimately, an officer's self-efficacy for writing, motivation to be a better writer, willingness to apply writing strategies, and simple effort will help them be better report writers.

### *Curricula Modification*

Modifying curricula to include targeted writing instruction can play an integral role in improving an officer's report writing skills. Integrating writing-focused modules into police training programs can effectively enhance writing proficiency [57]. Moreover, curriculum modifications can address officers' common writing challenges by incorporating targeted topics



such as structure, language, and grammatical correctness [58]. Furthermore, because of police work's nature, including practical exercises and real-world scenarios, a report writing curriculum helps develop the necessary skills and confidence to produce accurate and professional documentation [59]. While practical exercises and real-world scenarios are widely accepted practices in most, if not all, police academies across the United States, offering ongoing support and resources, such as writing workshops or access to writing tutors, might not be, which can further reinforce learning and promote continuous writing improvements [60]. Through these curriculum modifications, law enforcement agencies can ensure that officers receive extensive training in report writing, ultimately leading to more effective communication and documentation of law enforcement events.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) academy's curriculum analysis determined that competent instructional design is critical to training excellence [61]. Identifying a course's purpose, content, and method of consumption is the basis for good instructional design. An organizational goal of professional development and education is to develop employees interested in making decisions that benefit an organization. In police work, split-second decisions on the streets are routinely made, which can benefit or negatively impact an agency in the long run. For this reason, law enforcement training often includes scenario-based instruction and attempts to recreate routine situations or incidents in which other officers may have placed an agency at risk, were seriously injured, or killed.

In law enforcement, this means training is most effective when it mimics the realities of actual police work. Police officers fundamentally resolve situations, and a well-trained officer is better equipped to help the citizenry resolve situations unique to them. Training that mimics actual police work becomes even more authentic when introducing a robust and rigorous

report-writing component. Doing so might identify gaps and disconnects between a scenario and the written product that supports actions taken in the scenario.

### *Cultural Shift*

Law enforcement agencies are changing their culture to focus on better report writing, diversity, and leadership, which helps officers improve their skills and produce clearer, more accurate reports. Emphasizing the significance of building a culture prioritizing clear and accurate documentation is essential for enhancing police officers' report-writing skills [62]. One study shows that by promoting an environment where peers and leaders value and encourage writing proficiency, agencies can motivate officers to invest in improving their report-writing abilities [63]. Furthermore, embracing diversity and inclusivity within an agency can enrich officers' perspectives and enhance their cultural competence, thereby improving the quality of their report writing [64]. Effective leadership is also important in driving cultural change. According to a study on how empowering leadership promotes proactivity in the workplace [65], leaders who establish standards, provide or offer training opportunities, and lead by example facilitate conditions conducive to achieving favorable outcomes for others. Through these cultural shifts, law enforcement agencies can create a writing-focused culture that promotes professionalism and accountability in report writing.

Merriam-Webster defines buy-in as "acceptance of and willingness to actively support and participate in something, such as a proposed new plan or policy [66]. There needs to be buy-in at all levels for a writing cultural shift. In the early 1950s, *Dragnet's* main character, Joe Friday, coined "just the facts." Comparing how officers wrote reports in that era to how they are written today shows the strides the law enforcement community has made. However, not all officers have fully embraced the importance of getting more than just the facts and how collected information is presented in their writing.

Police culture can impede certain policing strategies, including training strategies. A study showed that law enforcement leadership and commitment to training are pivotal for practical training [67]. Importantly, the study included interviews with training managers who all agreed that changes in training philosophies and culture are relatively possible with commitment from police leaders and their staff. Acknowledging the need for an organizational change, whereby writing is as vital as putting "bad guys" in jail, is critical to a shift in police culture.

### *Emerging Trends in Police Report Writing*

Police report writing is critical for law enforcement professionals, ensuring accuracy, clarity, and objectivity in documenting incidents and investigations. With the advancement of technology, there are emerging trends in police report writing that aim to improve efficiency and effectiveness [68]. One emerging trend is the integration of electronic reporting systems. These systems allow officers to complete and submit reports electronically, eliminating the need for handwritten or typed reports. Additionally, these systems often have built-in templates and fields, which guide officers in providing all necessary information and ensuring consistency in report structure [69]. Another emerging trend is the use of artificial intelligence in police report writing. Artificial intelligence technologies, such as natural language processing and machine learning algorithms, can assist officers in generating reports by automatically extracting relevant information from various sources, such as body-worn camera footage, witness statements, and other evidence. These technologies can help officers save time and reduce the risk of human error in report writing.

### *Future Challenges in Law Enforcement Documentation*

Despite these emerging trends, there are also future challenges in police report writing proficiency that leaders need to address. One future challenge is the need for ongoing training

and education in report writing skills. Police academies need more attention to report writing, treating it as a mechanical process rather than a complex task [70]. This results in officers needing to prepare for the demands of effective report writing. Another future challenge is the need for officers to understand the social function of police reports in the criminal justice system. Officers must recognize that police reports serve not only as a record of factual details but also as goal-directed genre actions to facilitate the successful prosecution of criminal cases and the conviction of offenders.

Furthermore, there is a need to address the issue of collaboration in report writing [71]. Collaboration between officers may impact the accuracy and completeness of information in police reports, and future research should explore different forms of collaboration and their effects on report quality. In addition, the context of police writing as a rhetorical situation should be considered. Officers must consider the diverse audience needs and conflicting purposes of writing police reports rather than simply following a template or checklist approach [72].

Twenty-first-century policing comes with technological benefits, such as writing assistants that digitize police reports. While digitizing reports brings several benefits, it presents new challenges for law enforcement professionals and teaches how to use electronic reporting systems effectively [73]. This may require additional training and resources to ensure officers can efficiently navigate and utilize these systems. Another challenge is the potential for information overload. With artificial intelligence and electronic reporting systems, officers risk being overwhelmed by the vast data available [74]. They must develop the ability to sift through and analyze this data effectively to extract the most relevant and essential information for their reports.

Additionally, integrating AI-assisted writing tools in police report writing may pose challenges related to accuracy and reliability. Furthermore, the rise of social media and digital communication platforms introduces new challenges for police report writing. Officers now must consider the potential inclusion of screenshots, videos, and social media posts as evidence in their reports [75].

### *The Evolution of Report Writing Standards for Police*

The evolution of report-writing standards for police is necessary to address the complexities and demands of modern policing [76]. Reports must go beyond simply recording facts and include a comprehensive analysis of the situation, contextual information, and a thorough understanding of the intended audience [77]. This requires shifting from the traditional deficit report writing model to a more holistic and audience-centered approach. This approach would involve training officers to focus not only on grammar and mechanics but also on developing strong analytical skills, critical thinking abilities, and the ability to communicate complex information effectively.

In addition, the future of police report writing may involve leveraging technology such as artificial intelligence and natural language processing to automate certain aspects of report writing, such as formatting and proofreading, allowing officers to focus more on the content and analysis of their reports. Police report writing proficiency is essential for law enforcement officers to ensure accurate documentation of incidents and facilitate successful criminal prosecutions. Furthermore, as technology advances, police officers may need to adapt to using artificial intelligence and expert systems in report writing. This would require officers to be proficient in utilizing these technologies and able to analyze and validate the information they provide critically.

### *Technological Innovations Impacting Police Reporting*

Technological innovations such as speech-to-text software, pre-populated templates, and digital forms have significantly impacted police report writing proficiency. These tools can help streamline the report-writing process, reduce errors, and improve efficiency. Additionally, advancements in data analytics and artificial intelligence have the potential to revolutionize police reporting [78]. These technologies can assist in the analysis and interpretation of data, leading to more accurate and insightful reports. Furthermore, the increasing use of body-worn cameras and other recording devices in law enforcement has also raised new challenges for report writing. Officers must incorporate and analyze video footage, audio recordings, and other digital evidence in their reports, requiring additional skills and training. Overall, the emerging trends and future challenges of police report writing proficiency involve a shift towards a more holistic and audience-centered approach, integrating technology to automate certain aspects of report writing, and the need for officers to adapt to new forms of digital evidence and data analysis.

Collaboration and information-sharing among police officers in report writing must be addressed [79]. Furthermore, it is crucial to address the training and education gaps surrounding police report writing. This includes providing comprehensive training on report writing skills and the effective use of technology and emphasizing the importance of clear and concise communication in police reports to ensure accuracy and effectiveness in documenting incidents.

### *Adapting to New Reporting Protocols in Policing*

With the emergence of new technologies and the integration of artificial intelligence in policing, police officers may need to adapt to new reporting protocols. These protocols may involve automated report-writing systems, where officers input information into a real-time

digital platform that generates a report. This can streamline the reporting process and ensure that reports are standardized and consistent. Additionally, officers may need to become proficient in analyzing and interpreting data from various sources, such as body-worn cameras and other digital evidence. This requires a shift in training and education to equip officers with the necessary skills to effectively utilize these technologies and incorporate the information into their reports.

### *Anticipating the Needs of Modern Policing in Report Documentation*

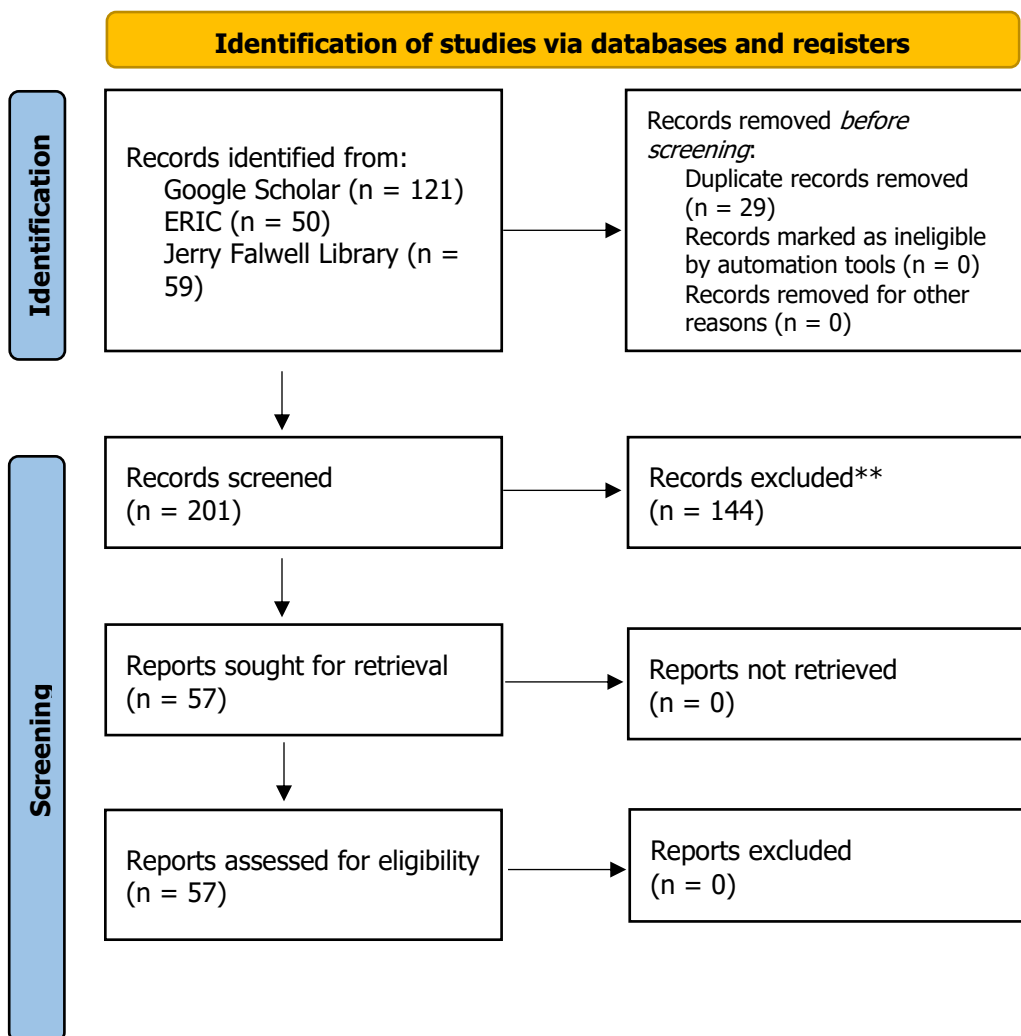
As the demands of modern policing continue to evolve, it is essential for report writing to anticipate these needs and adapt accordingly [80]. This includes incorporating innovative reporting techniques, such as multimedia elements and interactive forms, to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of information conveyed in police reports. Additionally, report writing should consider its audience's diverse needs, including judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and other criminal justice professionals [81]. By understanding the unique requirements and expectations of each stakeholder, police officers can tailor their reports to ensure they provide the necessary information in a format that is clear, concise, and easily accessible. Furthermore, as technology advances, there may be a shift towards using artificial intelligence and natural language processing in police report writing. This could automate certain aspects of report writing, such as grammar and spelling checks, freeing up officers' time to focus on higher-level analysis and interpretation of information. Lastly, it is crucial for police departments to prioritize and invest in ongoing training and development programs that focus on enhancing report writing proficiency. These programs should cover the technical aspects of report writing and emphasize critical thinking skills, effective communication strategies, and the ethical considerations of capturing and documenting information in police reports.

## **RESULTS**

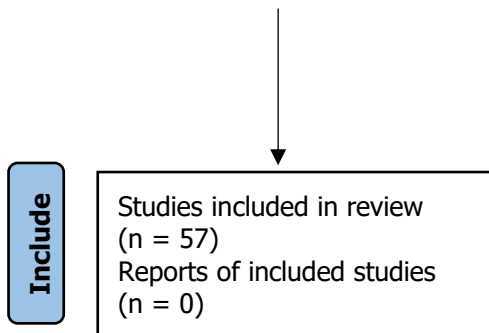
The initial search from the electronic databases using Google Scholar, ERIC, and the Jerry Falwell Library yielded 230 articles and books. After removing duplicates and screening for confirmation bias in law enforcement relevance, the results were narrowed to 57 sources. These 56 records were retrieved and reviewed in detail. The reference lists of these studies were further screened for additional relevant sources, but no new sources were added. Full-text access was obtained for all 56 records, and after the initial screening of titles and abstracts, all 57 fit the inclusion criteria.

The studies were grouped into four main thematic areas: (i) the importance of writing proficiency, (ii) the influence of organizational culture, (iii) training and education, and (iv) technological integration.

**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram: Overview of the study identification and selection process







1. **Importance of Writing Proficiency:** Studies consistently showed that proficient report writing enhances career progression and professional reputation among law enforcement officers. A study [82] found that supervisors, district attorneys, and judges view officers with strong writing skills more favorably. Additionally, well-written reports can significantly influence trial outcomes by providing clear and accurate documentation of events. Another study [83] concluded that writing proficiency is critical for accurately documenting law enforcement activities, which is vital for professional credibility and career advancement.
2. **Influence of Organizational Culture:** Research concluded that organizational culture within law enforcement agencies significantly impacts writing practices. A study [84] discussed how a culture that undervalues administrative duties like report writing can lead to poorly written reports. Conversely, another study [85] suggested that promoting a culture of continuous learning and writing excellence can enhance report quality. This cultural shift requires strong leadership and organizational support to prioritize writing proficiency.
3. **Training and Education:** Studies showed that targeted training programs are essential for improving report writing skills. A study [86] found that basic academy training often lacks detailed writing instruction and focuses more on perishable skills like firearms proficiency and arrest and control tactics. Another study [87] suggested that integrating writing-focused

modules into police training programs can enhance writing proficiency. Furthermore, research [88] shows the importance of routine constructive feedback and practical exercises in reinforcing writing skills.

4. **Technological Integration:** Studies indicate integrating technology in report writing could improve efficiency and accuracy. For example, one study [89] discussed the benefits of electronic reporting systems that provide templates and guidelines to ensure consistency. Additionally, artificial intelligence tools, such as natural language processing, can assist officers in generating reports by extracting relevant information from various sources. Research [90] shows the need for ongoing training to effectively use these technologies and ensure that officers can adapt to new tools and methodologies.

This review identified gaps in the literature, particularly in empirical studies evaluating the long-term effectiveness of training programs and technological tools. Future research might also focus on developing and testing interventions aimed at enhancing report writing proficiency in real-world policing contexts and assessing their impact on professional development and organizational culture.

## THEMES

Multiple themes emerged from the outcomes assessed in the literature. The author identified and categorized these themes, and studies were grouped into key categories inspired by different areas related to law enforcement report writing. Most studies evaluated one specific theme within the context of report writing while acknowledging others to a lesser degree; however, some overlap of themes emerged in studies.

**Table 1.** Summary of all themes, the variable(s) assessed in each theme, the studies that assessed the variable(s), and the studies' geographical region.

Theme	Variable(s) Assessed	Studies	Geographical Region
<b>Importance of</b>	Career impact, legal	Reynolds [44];	USA

<b>Writing Proficiency</b>	proceedings	Pomerantz et al. [42]; Richardson et al. [45]	
<b>Influence of Organizational Culture</b>	Cultural attitudes, leadership support	Crank [6]; Johnson [22]; Myhill & Bradford [36]; Perkins [40]	USA
<b>Training and Education</b>	Training programs, feedback mechanisms	Hernandez & Morris [19]; Glenn et al. [11]; Kanable [23]; Miller et al. [35]	USA
<b>Technological Integration</b>	AI tools, electronic reporting systems	McKnelly et al. [33]; Holt et al. [20]; Joh [21]; Richardson et al. [45]; Liou [28]	USA
<b>Professional Development</b>	Writing proficiency, skill development	Graham & Perin [12]; Zimmerman & Risemberg [56]	USA
<b>Legal and Societal Implications</b>	Legal standards, public expectations	Schade & Thielgen [47]; Vredeveltd et al. [50]	USA
<b>Psychological and Motivational Factors</b>	Self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation	Zumbrunn & Bruning [57]; Yu & Liu ([55]	USA
<b>Report Writing Practices</b>	Report writing styles, effectiveness	Fink [9]; Četković [5]	USA, Serbia
<b>Collaborative Writing</b>	Collaborative report writing, team dynamics	Vredeveltd et al. [51]; Schade & Thielgen [47]	USA
<b>Leadership and Supervision</b>	Leadership influence on writing practices	Hassan & Jiang [18]; Wang & Yang [52]	USA

From the included literature, the primary themes identified were (1) the importance of writing proficiency, (2) the influence of organizational culture, (3) training and education, and (4) technological integration. These themes capture the critical factors influencing effective report writing in law enforcement and highlight the interplay between individual skills, organizational support, training methodologies, and technological advancements.

## **DISCUSSION**

This thematic literature review aimed to define and evaluate the quantitative and qualitative data regarding the factors contributing to law enforcement report writing proficiency. It was conducted through standard methods outlined by leading scholars in the field to identify, select, and synthesize the findings from 57 studies. The current knowledge of law enforcement report writing was documented by analyzing the geographic scope of studies, the year of

publication, and the specific themes that emerged from the literature. Provided below are significant results of this review that can be relevant for future researchers, practitioners, and law enforcement training programs.

The included studies revealed the importance of writing proficiency in law enforcement. Officers with strong writing skills showed marked improvements in career progression, professional reputation, and the accuracy of legal proceedings [91, 92]. These benefits were consistent across different populations and settings, highlighting the utility of writing proficiency in enhancing overall effectiveness and ensuring accurate documentation [93]. Despite these positive findings, further research is needed to establish standardized protocols for measuring writing proficiency across diverse groups.

The literature also discussed the influence of organizational culture on writing practices. Substantial differences in report writing quality were noted among agencies with supportive leadership and a culture that values continuous learning and writing excellence [94, 95, 96]. These findings suggest that fostering a positive organizational culture is crucial for improving writing proficiency. However, the mechanisms through which organizational culture influences writing practices are not fully understood and warrant further investigation.

Training and education emerged as significant themes, with various studies highlighting the impact of targeted training programs on writing skills. Comprehensive training that includes practical writing exercises, feedback mechanisms, and the integration of writing instruction into police training curricula was shown to enhance report writing proficiency [97, 98, 99]. The importance of ongoing education and professional development in maintaining writing skills was also emphasized [100]. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of these training programs and develop standardized training protocols.

Technological integration in report writing was another key finding. The use of AI tools, electronic reporting systems, and other technological advancements was shown to improve the efficiency and accuracy of report writing [101, 102]. These technologies offer potential benefits for standardizing report formats, providing real-time feedback, and enhancing overall writing quality. However, the full potential of these technologies has not yet been realized, and further research is needed to explore their implementation and effectiveness in various law enforcement settings [103].

Professional development through writing proficiency was also discussed, with studies indicating that officers who continuously improve their writing skills experience better career outcomes and professional growth [104, 105, 106]. The importance of self-regulation and intrinsic motivation in writing skill development was highlighted, suggesting that personal qualities play a significant role in achieving writing proficiency [107].

The legal and societal implications of report writing practices were examined, with studies emphasizing the need for clear and accurate documentation to ensure justice and maintain public trust [108, 109, 110]. Poorly written reports can lead to legal challenges and undermine the credibility of law enforcement agencies. Future research should focus on developing guidelines and standards for report writing that can withstand legal scrutiny and enhance transparency.

The inclusion of psychological and motivational factors in writing proficiency was minimal but highlighted the need for more inclusive research. Studies focused on the role of self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and feedback literacy in writing skill development [111, 112]. Expanding research in this area could lead to better support and training for officers, ultimately improving report writing practices.

### *Future Research*

Understanding the many factors contributing to law enforcement report writing proficiency is vital. Continued research should aim to standardize measurement protocols and explore the long-term impacts of training programs and technological integration. Future studies should also consider integrating psychological and motivational factors and developing adaptive training programs to support diverse populations. By expanding the scope of research, including collaborative writing practices and leadership influence, scholars and practitioners can develop a more comprehensive understanding of report writing proficiency and its applications.

### *Strengths and Limitations of this Thematic Review*

This thematic literature review applied a systematic and rigorous search strategy to retrieve a comprehensive range of articles addressing law enforcement report writing proficiency. Considering both peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature, the review captured a broad spectrum of knowledge, including unpublished theses and conference presentations. However, some studies were unintentionally omitted due to limited access, and the exclusion of non-English language studies may have skewed the geographic analysis of the literature. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data in many studies introduces potential biases that should be addressed in future research.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study reviewed the literature on factors contributing to law enforcement report writing proficiency and discussed writing skills' impact on professional development, organizational culture, training methodologies, and technological integration. The review demonstrated writing proficiency's positive impact on career progression, legal proceedings, and organizational efficiency. However, the varying methodologies and outcomes indicate the need for more rigorous research to fully explain effective report writing mechanisms. Future research

should explore the role of organizational culture, training programs, and technological advancements in enhancing writing proficiency. Additionally, investigating psychological and motivational factors can improve writing skills. Integrating adaptive training programs and AI tools can offer personalized support, optimizing law enforcement officers' writing development. This review underscores the importance of proficient report writing in law enforcement and the need for continued research to standardize measurement protocols, enhance training methodologies, and integrate technological advancements.

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The author confirms that all the research in this work has met ethical guidelines and adhered to the legal requirements of the United States of America. In addition, the principal investigator is compliant with the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program on social and behavioral researchers and social and behavioral responsible conduct of research training. Furthermore, this work was not funded, the author declares no conflict of interest, and it did not contain studies with human participants or animals performed by the principal investigator.

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