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# Pro PI Academy

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1st Edition

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# Introduction

Pro PI Academy is the leader in online education programming for Georgia Private Investigators. For over 7 years, Pro PI Academy has been educating the best in the private investigative field. As a part of the educational opportunities, Pro PI Academy maintains an online blog to share information with all private investigators on the skills and techniques needed to remain the tops in their field. Some of our articles have been published by other powerhouses such as, PI NOW.

## Online

This format has been created to allow you catalog 10 articles in a downloadable format for easy reference when needed. You can still see the articles at [www.propiacademy.com](http://www.propiacademy.com) in the Academy Blog section and get the latest articles.

# Keep them calling...

As a private investigator you rely on information from others to complete your investigation. If you are a business owner, you rely on callbacks for more business. These tips will help you increase the chances that someone will call you when with information or new business:

- 1. Leave them your contact information** - Simple, but often investigators fail to leave a business card. Encourage them to call you. Encourage them to reach out if they just need some advice. *"Here's my contact information. Feel free to call if I can help you."*
- 2. Develop rapport, a relationship with the individual** - If they feel they know you, they will be more inclined to call you back. Spend time building the relationship, not only for an effective interview, but to put them at ease.
- 3. Check up on them** - If they are a victim, make a point to call them back after the investigation to see how they are getting along. Just a brief phone call will allow you to reaffirm the relationship, continue the rapport. You never know, they may refer someone to you for your next case. *Maybe a brief email too.*
- 4. No question is unimportant** - You may get calls from witnesses or clients with simple questions. Answer them promptly and provide help to them when you can. Builds trust, and, yes, it continues to maintain the relationship. A quick call from a client with a simple question is a great sign that they will call you in the future for their investigative needs.
- 5. Keep a contact list of individuals you have talked with** - Using your contact list on your phone or email, create a contact list. Include a note on how you met them, a personal piece of information you have learned about them. This will prompt your memory on how you met and the context. For example; "Jane Doe, witness in Pierce Company investigation. Has a birthday in June, son that plays little league baseball named Bill." *Entering this information in your contact list helps you remember as well.*

Building effective relationships with those that you encounter will improve your investigations and possibly build long term business relationships.

## Article 2

# “No Results” Investigation

You have conducted your investigation. Conducted interviews, reviewed countless hours of video, written documents, and other potential leads that will help you identify the suspect. Unfortunately, no suspect has been identified. So how do you handle your client?

Your client expects results. Your investigation has hit a dead-end with no results. You still need to get paid for your time, maybe your client will not agree. You need a game plan to respond to your client, providing them with the bad news.

**1. Complete your report.** You need to establish, in written form, all of the steps you have taken to successfully conclude the investigation. Your time records are important as well. You need to clearly identify the time you have invested in the investigation.

**2. Be prepared.** Expect your client to be unhappy. After all, in their mind, they contracted you to find the suspect, or to identify and recover the loss they experienced. When you are ready to present the final investigation to your client, expect them to be upset. As a private investigator you will need to control yourself when faced with unkind comments. Allow them time to vent their frustrations, some of their frustrations will target you.

**3. Explain your investigation.** Prepare an overview of your investigation. Include the steps you took, the interviews you conducted, and more importantly, all of the areas you covered. Your expertise may be challenged by the client, you need to be prepared to respond to their inquiries about your investigation.

**4. Avoid speculation.** When faced with criticism, you may want to argue, provide an explanation of why you could not locate the property or identify the suspect. If your argument is not based on facts, then don't say it. Speculating on the investigation could lead the client to deciding that you are not competent in your duties. Worse, they may act on your speculation opening you to potential civil actions if they take adverse actions against employees.

**5. Expect threats refusing to pay you for your services.** Again, you will need to exercise restraint. Your interpersonal skills will be put to the test. If you have a contract in place, let it work for you. Avoid getting in arguments, or responding negatively to their comments. Often threats will be made during a bout of emotional stress. You can address non-payment at the time they actually refuse to pay you. If they do, you may need to contact legal counsel to help you pursue the payment for your services. Save this action for the last resort, and most importantly, allow them time to cool off before you make any threats of taking legal action.

Unfortunately, there are times that your investigation will not come to a completely successful conclusion. You need to be prepared, have your documentation in order, and to deliver in accordance with the terms of your contract.

## Article 3

# Learning: Outside of the Profession

At Pro PI Academy, we offer training for the professional private investigator tradecraft. We provide entry level and continuing education training programs to help you maintain your knowledge, and improve your tradecraft. We acknowledge that industry only learning is not enough to make our graduates successful.

Learning outside of the private investigator profession will build on your personal skills, help you to better understand the environments you work within, and the tools you work with everyday. Let's look at a few learning ideas that are critical to improving your ability to work more efficiently, and effectively.



**1. Personal Development** - Learning about people, what motivates them, how you can better interact with those around you is personal development learning. Now you can easily see how personal development can better your performance as a private investigator. Consider learning in topics such as psychology, interpersonal relations, social behaviors, or team building.

**2. Work Tools** - As a private investigator you use a variety of tools in conducting your investigations. Cameras, video recorders, smartphones, computers and the various software programs are all tools you use everyday. Learning more on how to use these tools will increase your efficiency which leads to increased productivity. (Efficiency = Productivity which equals to more personal time!) Better understanding of the tools that you use everyday will improve your overall investigations.

**3. Customer Service** - Whether you are starting as an apprentice private investigator, or you are a business owner, improving your customer service skills is critical to earning repeat business. Private investigative work is a profit



motivated business, but, being customer service oriented is a way to improve your interview techniques, develop information resources, and increase your overall enjoyment of your private investigator work.

These are only a few skill areas to add to your learning curriculum. You can probably think of several more topics. (Feel free to add your ideas by commenting on this article below.) We encourage you to continue your professional private investigation learning while continuing to learn about topics that will help improve your overall productivity which leads to greater job satisfaction.

## Article 4

# “All we want are the facts...”

Recognize the title? It was the common phrase used by Detective Sgt. Joe Friday, not “Just the facts” that is often erroneously attributed to the television series actor. Ok, enough trivia.

In any investigation the primary responsibility of a private investigator is to gather facts. But what exactly is a fact. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines “fact” as; (paraphrasing); the quality of being actual; something that has actual existence; an actual occurrence. Private investigators have the burden of proving something to be factual. So how do you do it?

Although it’s not fool-proof, one method is to verify the “information” from two different sources are not related to each other, or at least directly related. For example;



Witness stated that the office door lock would not secure properly. Investigator observed the locking mechanism on the office door with a piece of tape over the lock throw preventing it from extending into the door jamb.

The witness said it did not work and the investigator observed that it did not work properly.

A simple model

Verifying a fact with a second source will ensure that the information is factual. Consider that a statement made is just a statement, a piece of information. Verifying the statement from a second source then establishes a fact.

This simple model is important when reviewing witness statements. Further, Witness # 2 could be replaced with observation of video footage, or a document.

## Verifying Facts

Verifying information with a second source, when possible, will establish a "fact" from information. This will improve the accuracy of your final findings in the investigation. Focus on using this simple method for facts that are relevant to the case to ensure you are providing proven information.

Sometimes this can be tricky if you have only one witness. Look for information the witness provides that can be verified from another source. Here are a few examples:

Suspect was in a room at a specific time.

- Video of suspect heading toward the specific room with timestamp.
- Secondary witnesses that observed suspect heading toward the room.
- Suspect's own statement.

Suspect removed a specific item.

- Verify the item was in the specific location prior to the time it was taken.
- Depending on the item, a search of inventory records may help.
- Location where item was found other than the initial location.

Ok, you get the idea of verifying information. As a private investigator, gathering facts is your primary responsibility in any investigation. Verify that you are providing facts relevant to the case versus providing information only. Failing to verify information to determine if it is factual can end in an incomplete, or worse, faulty investigation.

## Article 5

# Courtroom Testimony

Testifying in court can be challenging depending on the case and the opposing counsel. As a private investigator you will be tested on the stand. Here are a few tips to help:



1. **Dress appropriately** - Should not have to say this. However, there have been a few that fail to dress appropriately for their court appearance. Men need to wear business suits. Don't wear loud ties. Women should wear business suits as well. Both should make sure their hair is neat, clothes pressed and clean. Navy blue suits, a white shirt are a good choice. Court appearances are not the time to wear your pullover shirts with a company logo and BDU pants! Nor is it appropriate to wear your favorite, flowery Hawaiian shirt!

2. **Prepare in advance** - Review your case file days in advance. Work on dates and times. One investigator suggested reviewing the case from a chronological perspective. Why? Opposing counsel may try to jump around and confuse you. Having a great grasp of the case in a chronological order of events will help you avoid being confused.

3. **Remember your audience** - When you are testifying in a jury trial, your audience is the jury. Look at counsel when they ask a question, then turn to the jury and answer to them. This is out of the ordinary so you may want to practice. Make eye contact and don't become distracted by faces the jury members may make when you answer.

4. **Mind your manners** - "Yes sir", "No ma'am", are the proper manners to exhibit in court. Just like your parents taught you. Always, always, mind your manners.

5. **Not sure what question was asked?** - Ask for the question to be repeated. Trying to answer a question you don't fully understand or did not hear completely can cause confusion. Minding your manners simply say, "Could you repeat the question ma'am?".

6. **Answer the question asked Only** - While on the stand it is important that you answer the question asked. Don't embellish, don't attempt to guess what they "are really asking". Counsel may ask clarifying questions if there is confusion. Just state the facts that are relevant to the question. Avoid giving a dissertation.

7. **Keep your cool** - If counsel becomes agitated, or aggressive, maintain your composure. Remain calm. Answer calmly. If you become angry in your responses the jury will notice and it will probably not create a good impression in their minds. One way to maintain your composure is to take a few seconds before responding. Think of the question asked, and answer calmly. This can be really tough for many investigators.

8. **Don't be funny** - You have probably heard the story of a detective that was once asked in court, "How far can you see at night?". The detective thought, then answered, "About 239,000 miles. that is how far the moon is from earth." Funny, but not an appropriate answer.

9. **Pause when asked a question** - It is important that whenever you are asked a question that you pause for a few seconds. Why? counsel may object to the question. Allowing them time to respond may be critical to the case before you answer.

10. **Poker face** - One investigator shared that she always wears her best poker face, trying to appear and sound like "Sgt. Joe Friday". She cautioned that there may be some rare exceptions. (Not sure who Joe Friday is? Watch the video below.)

## Article 6

# Interview Basics

The best techniques are still the old "tried and true" techniques to get the most out of investigative interviews.

1. Establish Rapport - spend a few minutes just chatting with the interviewee. Developing a good rapport builds trust, relaxes the individual, which encourages them to speak more freely.

2. Record when possible - when you can, record your interviews. Review the recordings to hear anything you may have missed during the interview. Recording also allows you to focus on observing the individual you are interviewing.

3. Prepare in advance - take a few minutes to understand how the individual is related to your investigation. Jot down some key questions you want to ask.

4. Be an active listener - focus your attention on the individual. Paraphrase what they say to make sure you heard them accurately. Be patient when they are "telling their story" listening for key elements you want to address in further detail.

5. Annotate your interview notes - as soon as the interview is concluded, jot down some additional notes to make sure you will clearly understand them later.

6. Always ask if there is anything you may have missed - At the conclusion of your interview, ask the individual if there is anything else they may have recalled that would be important to your investigation.



7. "Leave the door open" - Conclude your interview with an invitation for them to call you if they remember an important detail later. Share your contact information when appropriate.

These seven, simple techniques will improve your interview skills.

Article 7

# Note Taking Skills: 5 Step Method

When you graduated high school you probably thought taking notes was a thing of the past!!! Professionals in every field find note taking to be a critical skill.

Although technology provides several note taking tools, pen and paper (notebook) are still the best for taking notes. Whether you are novice or a skilled professional honing your note taking skills will provide allow you

to accurately record information, verify you have the information you need and reduce the time you need to complete your investigative report.



Pen/pencil and paper is the best note taking tool! - Although technology provides many benefits and without smartphones, computers, tablets, audio and video recorders you would not be able to complete your tasks as a professional private investigator, pencil and paper is still the be. Just like a car mechanic, you need to pick the right tool for the right task.

Using technology to take notes during an interview is distracting and takes more time than a notebook and pencil. Audio/video recorders are great tools for recording action as it happens but in an interview they are a hindrance for the person being interviewed to freely share information. Later, when you are trying to write your report, it is difficult to find a specific fact-- rewinding and fast-forwarding is frustrating when you are in a hurry.

**SAFETY FIRST!** When using technology it is easy for you to get distracted scrolling, highlighting, saving, etc. With paper and pencil you maintain awareness of your situation.



Five steps to improve your note taking abilities:

1. **Focus on the information you NEED!** When interviewed, people provide a lot of information that is not relevant to the investigation. Write down the important items. For example; you are interviewing a witness about a crime they observed. The interviewee may respond to your question, “What did you see?” with,

*“I had just got my coffee from the store around the corner and was walking back to the office. When I walked in to the office I saw a lot of people standing in front of Tom’s office. Tom has been the manager for a couple of years and doesn’t talk to a lot of people. There was a man wearing a red shirt and dark pants yelling at Tom. The man in the red shirt then threw a notebook at Tom. Tom is really a nice guy so I thought it was odd that someone was so mad at him.”*

Notes: Entered office and saw man, red shirt dark pants yelling at Tom. Several people standing near office. Man threw notebook at Tom.

2. **Draw diagrams when appropriate.** Not only will it help the interviewee recall facts, they can show you what happened. In the previous example, having the interviewee show where everyone was standing in relation to their position will help you verify they could actually see the man throwing the notebook and will assist in identifying additional witnesses.

3. **Don’t try to catch every word they are saying.** Much of the english language is filled with additional words. Don’t worry about using complete sentences in your notes. You can fill in blanks later when you have time.

4. **Review your notes with the person being interviewed for accuracy.** At the end of the interview review your notes with the interviewee. You verify your

notes and it provides the interviewee the opportunity to recall additional information they may have left out.

*“You saw a man in a red shirt with dark pants throw a notebook at Tom.”*

*“Yes. Did I mention that he had a cowboy hat on too? I believe he might have been wearing cowboy boots and was wearing a large belt buckle like a rodeo rider.”*

5. **Edit your notes as soon as possible.** Scribbling a few key words during the interview makes a lot of sense to you at the time. If you wait too long after the interview your notes they may not make sense.

Getting in the habit of following these five simple steps will improve your overall investigation.

## Article 8

# Importance of 'great' report writing

Experienced private investigators realize the importance of professional investigative reports. Reports you provide your client 'live' a long time and are read by several people weeks, months or years after you completed the investigation. Professional private investigators view the finished report as product that advertises their firm. People that are impressed with your work may contract with you in the future.



First step in creating professional reports is to avoid common mistakes that create a bad impression of your work:

- **Waiting to the last minute** - waiting until the night before it is due might have worked with your high school term paper but it is not a professional business practice. Start early, give yourself time to proofread, proofread, fact check, proofread.
- **Spelling** - with spell check software, spelling errors are no longer acceptable.
- **"The...."** - years ago, when police reports were hand-written, I had a police sergeant use a red pen to strike-out the word "The" when I used it to begin a sentence. Aggravated me because I had to re-write the entire report. He was right a majority of the time. *"The repeated use of the word "The" at the beginning of a sentence and the use of "The" throughout a*

*sentence is the problem with a lot of the reports I have read:-)" Being funny?*

- **Too wordy!** - reports reflect the **relevant** facts about the case. Often investigators include too much information that is not relevant to the case. This *Extra* information in a report frustrates the reader of the report.
- **"What I did!"** - read reports carefully to remove information about your prowess as an investigator. Statements such as; "*Investigator realized there was an opportunity to collect additional evidence.*" Is this important information for your report to contain?

To improve your finished report product, take time, a lot of time, in completing the final report. Use the following steps every time you write a report. Your finished reports will improve immediately!!!

#### Outline/Method

1. Mentally regurgitate on paper! - Write the report without worrying about spelling, grammar, all the mistakes mentioned previously. Get all the information on paper or in your word processing software.
2. First proofread - strike any sentences/facts not relevant to the case. Example: a workers compensation case where you observed the principal playing tennis. Is it critical for your client to know the turn-by-turn route they drove to the tennis court?
3. Second proofread - remove un-needed descriptors, extra words that don't help the reader understand the facts. For example: "*The investigator made an appointment to meet with John Adams early in the morning at his office to conduct a verbal interview.*" Consider this

sentence instead. "*Investigator interviewed John Adams in his office at 7:00 am*"

4. Third proofread - check grammar, spelling and word use. Pay attention to *homonyms* like "*Their*" and "*There*" as spell check will not catch them.
5. Fourth proofread - get another professional to proofread your work. If you are a one-person firm, this would be a great time to network with another professional and offer to do the same for them.
6. Marinate your report - Let your report sit for 24 hours then proofread again checking for all errors above. Waiting 24 hours gives you a fresh perspective when you read your report as well as giving you the opportunity to remember important details you may have omitted.

This is time consuming but it is your "finished product". Your completed report will create an impression with many individuals for weeks to come. Invest the time to get it right.

## Article 9

# Mind Map Your Investigation

Ever think you have completed an investigation only to find there was one more interview to complete, another document that you need to collect, or a piece of evidence you forgot to look for? Ever had a difficult time explaining the linkages among interviews and evidence to a client?

How do you ensure you are completing all the tasks associated with your investigation? Creating a task list is one way, but sometimes it might lack the ability for you to visualize important information you need to seek out.

Using a mind-map is another technique that might be useful to you in completing an investigation. A mind-map is simple hand drawn chart, like one in the graphic, allows you to visualize your investigation, look for links and create checklists.

Take a few minutes to scratch out a simple mind map to see how useful it can be on a current or upcoming investigation. There are free programs online you can use to create and print a mind map as well.



## Article 10

# Client Relations

Communication is a critical element of customer service. Throughout the investigation keep your client up-to-date on the progress of your investigation. Follow these steps to keep client's informed:

1. Set a schedule with the client to let them know when they can expect to receive updates. Provide daily or weekly updates depending on the type of investigation. Agree to a method that you will use to update your client such as email, a telephone call or in-person meetings.

2. Provide general highlights of the investigation. Let them know the basic activities you have completed. Do not get too detailed, that is what your report is for. For example; "*This week we have conducted several interviews and gathered additional documentation.*"

3. Stick to your schedule. Once you establish an expectation with your client about scheduled updates make sure you strictly follow it. Meeting your customer's expectations is critical to good customer relations. If you have nothing to report, tell them there is nothing to report.

Customer service is the best way to build your professional private investigator business.

