

Los Angeles Police Department
ABCs of Call-Taking
1850-30904
Expanded Course Outline

Instructional Goal: To provide the student with proper call-taking techniques to employ as a Public Safety Dispatcher (PSD).

Performance Objective: Using group discussions and learning activities, the student will

- ❑ Recall the elements of an interview that can impact callers
- ❑ Determine when to elicit and when to provide information
- ❑ Define the five fundamental ground rules for call-taking
- ❑ Key statements from a "Suicide By Cop" call that indicate
- ❑ Effective/ineffective listening techniques
- ❑ Methods for building a rapport with different types of callers (i.e. frightened, angry)
- ❑ Techniques for determining the location of callers who are lost and using cellular telephones
- ❑ Text that summarizes the key elements of a call
- ❑ Correct prioritization of multiple tasks
- ❑ Customer service techniques
- ❑ The difference and affect that tone of voice and attitude have on a caller

I. CALL TAKING OVERVIEW

(30 minutes)

A. Introduction

1. Instructor (s)
 - a. Name, Assignment
 - b. Experience
 - c. Contact Numbers
2. Student
 - a. Name, Assignment
 - b. Experience
 - c. Expectations

B. Administrative responsibilities

1. Course Roster
2. Facility Information
3. Agenda

C. Brief overview of training goals and objectives

1. Core Value- We provide a service to our communities when we are aware of our roles and the apparent danger levels associated with certain situations.
2. It is important that the Public Safety Dispatcher understands the importance and role the call-taker has in the public safety profession and have knowledge of the fundamental ground rules and basic concepts that apply to call-taking.
3. The PSD must have a heightened awareness of citizen and officer safety issues, questions to determine the danger level, and techniques to obtain descriptions from callers.
4. It is vital that call-takers be properly equipped with advanced techniques to improve their communication skills to deal with calls received from cell phone callers, hearing impaired callers and those with language barriers.
5. It is imperative that callers have an awareness of the multitude of competing tasks along with the knowledge of how to prioritize and respond to those tasks.

D. **ICE BREAKER #1:** Questions Only (LA1)

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Purpose: In this game, adapted from “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” students will assess their skills of question asking in a spontaneous fashion without being allowed to make any comments or statements.

Procedure: Entire Class Activity

1. Select a group of four students.
2. Each group will be given a scenario.

Scenarios:

- a. Two dispatchers working morning watch do not get along
 - b. Two lovers having an argument at a restaurant
3. The students are to ask each other questions based only on the scenario given.
 4. The first player who makes a statement or takes too long to respond with a question will hear a bell or buzzer and may no longer play the game.
 5. The next person within that group steps in and begins asking questions.
 6. Continue until only one player is left on the team.
- Repeat the exercise with another group of four as the rest of the class looks on. Continue the rotation until all students have had a chance to participate.

II. THE IMPORANCE OF CALL-TAKING

(15 minutes)

The Importance of Call-Taking

- A. The safety of many depends on your decisions: Information obtained over the phone and dispatched over the radio can impact the safety and lives of citizens, officers, and other public safety personnel.
- B. 1st contact = lasting impression: A citizens first contact with a police agency might be you. The impression the citizen is left with will be a lasting one.
- C. Dispatchers save seconds... Seconds save lives: Often call-takers must be able to extract information from a caller in the shortest amount of time possible. Seconds do save lives.
- D. Calm and professional means less chaos for the caller: In many cases, the caller will be excited, perhaps hysterical. A good dispatcher takes command of the conversation by use of their voice, through their tone and through a steady, calm professional approach involving direct questioning.
 1. Lowering your voice can focus the caller into listening to you.
 2. Reassuring that an officer is being dispatched can encourage the caller to continue the flow of information. Some callers believe no one is responding until they hang up.
 3. Asking direct questions can help the caller concentrate on the answer.
- E. The Skilled and Proficient Call-Taker: A call-taker is the foundation for the information needed to dispatch calls for service. If this base of knowledge is solid, it allows the radio dispatcher and officers to do their job efficiently, allowing for the safest possible approach and outcome.
- F. Negligent Call-Taking

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- G. Your documentation can be essential to a conviction: A good call-taker can also help investigators build a case and aid the prosecution in securing a conviction against the defendant.
1. The caller might have difficulty remembering descriptions or the sequence of events later. Other aspects of the incident might shock or impact their memory.
 2. By asking specific questions, the dispatcher might help the caller remember detailed information at the time of the event.
 3. The victim frequently recants a Domestic Violence case. Information provided by the dispatcher has great value to officers and judges when trying to determine what occurred.
- H. Liability: Understand Vicarious Liability. Department rules and procedures, Boundaries, Representing your department:
As a public safety dispatcher, liability can be of concern. You and/or your agency can be liable for your actions or inaction. You must learn and adhere to your agency's policies and procedures.
1. **Ask:** What are some issues that may end in liability for a dispatcher?
 2. Expected responses
 - a. Not obtaining pertinent information.
 - b. Not documenting pertinent information.
 - c. Not broadcasting pertinent information.
 - d. Not asking appropriate questions.
 3. Do not allow your values and morals to determine the outcome of a call for service. Your job is to assist, not judge.

III. CALL-TAKING ELEMENTS (15 minutes)

- A. Call taking has two elements, eliciting information and giving information.
1. *Eliciting information* deals with getting something from your caller. That has always been a duty we have had as dispatchers. "What, where, who, when, why, how" have always been standard questions.
 2. *Giving information* deals with imparting instructions or information to the caller.

IV. GROUND RULES OF CALL-TAKING (20 minutes)

- A. Establishing ground rules of call-taking

ASK: What are some ground rules of call-taking including behavior, actions, and interview style?

Expected Responses:

1. Be prepared. Any call can be an emergency like Columbine.
2. Know what questions to ask depending on the type of call.
3. Guide the caller to obtain information.
4. Control the conversation. Do not allow the caller to ramble.
5. Limit or eliminate pauses between questions.
6. Remain courteous, professional, non-judgmental compassionate and empathetic always, through all calls.

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7. Remember, you are the trained professional, they haven't been trained to handle emergencies. Your job is to assist the caller and responding units.
8. Project confidence and competence.

B. LEARNING ACTIVITY: Effective/Ineffective Call-Taking (LA2)

Purpose: Students will listen to effective and ineffective techniques of call-taking

Procedure: Entire Class Activity

1. Separate the class into two groups.
2. Select two students to read the transcript of a call.

Transcript: **"Effective" Call**

Dispatcher: Police Department, Joy speaking

Caller: Hi, I need some help and I don't know who to call.

Dispatcher: What is your address, sir?

Caller: 127 Lepinski Way.

Dispatcher: How can I help you?

Caller: There is a stranger at my neighbor's house and I don't know what he is doing.

Dispatcher: What is your neighbor's address?

Caller: 123 Lepinski Way, it's right next door, the brown 2-story house.

Dispatcher: The man at your neighbors, is he White, Black or Hispanic?

Caller: He is a white guy, very tall.

Dispatcher: How old is he?

Caller: I'm not sure, maybe between 20-25 years old.

Dispatcher: You said he was tall, what do you mean, over 6-feet?

Caller: No, not that tall, about 5-9.

Dispatcher: What is he wearing?

Caller: Black pants, no shoes, and a blue shirt, I think.

Dispatcher: Was he wearing any type of hat?

Caller: Oh yeah, a baseball cap.

Dispatcher: Can you see what the man is doing?

Caller: No, I can't see him anymore, he might have gone into the backyard. He was hanging out looking into the window of the house.

Dispatcher: Have you ever seen him before? Is he familiar to the neighborhood?

Caller: No, I've never seen him before.

Dispatcher: Can I have your name please?

Caller: Jessie, Jessie Car Poole

Dispatcher: Could I have your phone number?

Caller: Sure, 555-1212

Dispatcher: I will have an officer contact you as soon as possible. If you get any further information, give us a call back so we can update the officer responding.

Caller: Ok, thanks, bye.

Dispatcher: Goodbye.

3. Have the students state what the call-taker does correctly.

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Expected Responses:

- a. Identified themselves
- b. Close-ended questions
- c. Asked the who, what, when, where and how questions
- d. Obtained detailed suspect description
- e. Advised caller of the “what and where” is occurring with the call.
- f. Interview complete including intro, body, and close
- g. Professional demeanor
- h. Courteous

Transcript: **“Ineffective” Call**

Dispatcher: Police Department

Caller: Hi, I need some help and I don't know who to call. There's a guy on the side of my neighbor's yard and he is up to no good. I have had my car broken into 3 times in the last 2 weeks and I am getting sick of this. Do you guys ever patrol the area? If you get out here right away, you can catch him. Does Officer Smith still work there? He used to live next to my wife's parents. Maybe he could come out if he is on duty. I don't know where the weirdo went, all of a sudden, I can't see him. You might want to hurry, I hope he ain't cleaning out the neighbor's house. Boy is he gonna be pissed and you do not want to deal with that.

Dispatcher: The guy at your neighbor's, what does he look like?

Caller: He's a big guy, dark pants, blue shirt and I don't think he has shoes on. He is carrying a backpack and has a red coat.

Dispatcher:the dispatcher is typing and does not speak for a minute or so.....

Caller: HELLO? Are you still there?

Dispatcher: Yes sir, I am here. I am trying to type in the information you gave me.

Caller: You better hurry, he might get away.

Dispatcher: ...in a snotty voice...Sir, we will get there when we can. You are not the only emergency we are dealing with at the moment.

Caller: Well if you don't care, I don't care.

Dispatcher: I did not say “I don't care”. Where are you calling from?

Caller: I live on the east side of town.

Dispatcher: What is the address of your neighbor?

Caller: 123 Lepinski Way. The house is a 2-story on the corner of Lepinski and Myers.

Dispatcher: We will get someone right out.

Dispatcher: Goodbye.

4. Scribe students' responses about what the call-taker does incorrectly on easel board.

Expected Responses:

- a. Fail to fully identify themselves
- b. Allows caller to ramble

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- c. Opened – vague questions
- d. Does not maintain flow of questions
- e. Poor tone
- f. Poor attitude
- g. Lack empathy
- h. Did not obtain location immediately
- i. Incomplete interview
- j. No introduction, body, nor close to the interview

V. BASIC CONCEPTS AND SKILLS FOR CALL-TAKING

(60 minutes)

A. Keen Listening Skills

Critical in call taking or dispatching. Often, a caller will give a location, or a name, or nature of the problem in their first sentence. (“There’s been an accident” or, “Send police to 123 Main Street”.) Sometimes, the time element is obvious (“I hear noises”), but sometimes you have to dig a little (“I want to report a crime”). Good listening can save you lots of time.

B. *LEARNING ACTIVITY:* Starting Lines (LA3)

Purpose: To develop quick thinking and assessment skills and apply the 5-W’s to call taking.

Procedures: Small Group Activity

1. Break the class up into groups of 4-6 students.
2. Have one student scribe per group.
3. The instructor will read a single statement from the Starting Lines List.
4. Students have a minute to write their questions.
5. Score the answers. Scores will be based on the student’s ability to ask questions as follows: 5 points each for the 5 basic W’s: who, what, where, when, why (and 5 points for How). If any of the five basic W’s are forgotten, 5 points are subtracted for each missed W. Two additional points may be given for follow up questions: Where in the house; How many people; descriptions, weapons, etc.
6. Facilitate a discussion.
 - a. Ask input from the rest of the class if they would have done anything differently.
 - b. Discuss how people see the same thing differently.
 - c. Discuss the importance of obtaining information and disseminating it in a manner that is incremental, standard, easily understood and easily followed.

C. Debriefing

1. Primary Questions (to reinforce the learning activity)

- a. On many calls, the information must be pulled out of the caller, and it must be done quickly to initiate the appropriate aid. The basic primary questions of Where-What-When will often be all that is needed to start assistance, but the additional secondary information and descriptions you obtain may mean the difference between a suspect being apprehended or not.
- b. The Importance of What, When & Where

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- 1) There is no difference to a citizen between a robbery, a burglary or a theft. If a person has something taken from them, whether they have been held up at gunpoint, returned home to discover someone has broken in, or a store clerk witnessing a shoplift, their first reaction is, "I've been robbed!". It is up to you to make that determination by questioning. You must be able to recognize **what** has occurred to ask the proper questions; you must find out **when** it happened to know how urgent your reaction should be; and you must know the location **where** the incident occurred or where help is needed.
 - 2) **WHAT** may indicate a need for medical or FD response
 - a) Assess the need and handle according to your agency's policy
(transfer call to medical, build a CAD call, etc.)
 - b) Be sure and alert the medical/fire units of any threat and have them stage until the scene is secure.
2. Secondary Questions (to reinforce the learning activity)
- a. After receiving the primary information for the initial dispatch, you must return to the caller for as much additional information as possible. You will not always be able to obtain as much as you'd like, but by questioning the caller instead of allowing them to "ramble", you control the conversation. On any emergency call you want to first obtain a brief description so the field units entering the area can begin searching; therefore, it's very important to ask if there is a vehicle involved. The last thing we want is for the suspect(s) to just drive right out of the scene, passing the responding units. After the initial dispatch, go back for a detailed description.
 - b. Along with the primary questions of Where-What-When, secondary questions of Who, Weapons, and Why are also important. A way to remember is to call these the "6 W's".

D. LEARNING ACTIVITY: BOLO Exercise Variation (LA4)

Purpose: Demonstrate the importance of controlling, directing and being concise when call-taking.

Procedure: Large group activity

1. Have someone come into the class to deliver a message or have someone take some property i.e. person and leave.
 2. Each student should receive a BOLO Information Sheet for situation.
 3. Have the student complete their sheet and write their BOLO as they would for a radio broadcast.
 4. **Ask:** Did anyone get something different?
 5. Discuss: How people see the same things differently. And the importance of obtaining information and disseminating it in a manner that is incremental, standard easily understood and followed.
- E. Obtaining Descriptions (**LECTURETTE:** To reinforce the learning activity)
To ask description questions, you first need to know what information is needed and you must put yourself in the position of the responding units.

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1. Subject Descriptions. What will catch your eye first? Sex & race, age, height, weight, hair (color and style) and visible clothing. Outer clothing can be shed quickly so it's important to also try for a description of shirts underneath jackets, etc. Clothing should be described from head to foot, inside to out. The importance of a detailed description depends upon the type of call and the time element involved.
 - a. Never simply ask, "What did he look like?" "He" could be "she". Instead, guide callers by directing their attention to answering your questions, "Was the person male or female? Was he/she white? About how old?" If your caller hesitates or is unsure of any question, just go on to your next question: "What color was his hair?" Know what your next question is so you don't hesitate. You are looking for a description to find someone or a question in this manner, you will usually find a two-fold benefit: not only are you obtaining the information you need, in many cases you will have calmed the reporting part down, making him/her concentrate on what you are saying instead of how upset they are or what has happened.
 - b. Direction of travel (DOT) is critical. Again, put yourself in the shoes of the responding unit. Obtaining directions in a NB, SB, EB, WB format is the ideal. If your caller doesn't know whether something runs north or south, try for something like, "On foot on Sunset heading toward downtown" or "On Thornton headed away from the freeway".
 2. Vehicle Descriptions. One of the easiest ways to remember how to obtain vehicle description is with the acronym **CYMBALS** (color, year, make, body type, anything else, license, state). As with obtaining any description, the obvious, what you notice first, is what you want to obtain first on vehicle descriptions. Very rarely will a person be able to describe a vehicle in detail, except when describing their own, and sometimes not even then! By knowing what information, you need, you guide them by asking direct questions, "What color was the car? Is it full-size? Two doors, four doors or a hatchback?" Direction of travel is a critical component along with the time element of when the suspect fled.
 3. Weapon Descriptions. Proper definition of weapon types is **critical** in the decision-making process of officers responding to a call. Whenever possible, be as specific as you can. If your caller doesn't know guns can they tell you if it is a long gun (i.e. rifle, shotgun, AK47, etc.) or handgun (revolver, automatic, etc.). On a knife, long blade, short blade, etc.
- F. Second and Third-Hand Callers
1. While we prefer to talk to the original involved party (caller), this is not always possible.
 2. Information from second or third hand callers can lack the detail the original party can give.
 3. It is important to note in your detail that the caller is second-hand, third-hand, etc.
 4. Do not discount the information that a caller of this type can give you.

VI. CITIZEN AND OFFICER SAFETY ISSUES

(40 minutes)

A. LEARNING ACTIVITY: Suicide by Cop (video vignette) (LA5)

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Purpose: Recognize the threat level to citizen and responding officers for a suicide by cop situation. Also, to discuss the responsibility of the dispatcher to obtain information while remaining non-judgmental and professional despite any attitudes or priorities conveyed by the caller.

Procedure: Large group activity

1. Introduce the video clip from the POST Telecourse Video **Suicide by Cop** (Part I, July 1999)

A wife is calling about her suicidal husband. Advise the students to be prepared to discuss the demeanor of the wife and the attitude of the dispatcher taking the call, as well as the threat level to citizens and responding units.

2. Play the entire scenario (approximately 6 minutes)

3. **Ask:**

- a. What was the demeanor of the wife

Expected Responses:

- 1) Calm
- 2) Possibly in shock
- 3) Matter-of-fact
- 4) Not shaken up or moved

- b. What impact did that demeanor have on the dispatcher, if any?

Expected Responses:

- 1) Short (Why didn't you call then?)
- 2) Possibly hard to believe the caller
- 3) Intrusive (interrupted the caller, cut her off)
- 4) Rude

- c. What statements and information help us to assess the threat level to citizens and responding officers on this call?

Expected Responses:

- 1) Direct questions as to the threat level
- 2) Location of the weapons
- 3) Types of weapons
- 4) History of weaponry usage
- 5) History of suicide attempts
- 6) Present state of mind of suspect (i.e. depression, on medication)

B. Questions to determine the danger level to the caller or involved parties at the scene

1. If the caller is in peril, you have a duty to get them to seek safety. If the caller is not in peril but does have an emergency, make every effort to keep that caller on the line until units arrive on scene and direct you to release the call.
2. Others at scene or nearby Are there others with the subject? What are they doing? Think, "Are they at risk in this situation?" and "What can I do to get them out of harm's way?"

C. Questions to determine the danger level to responding units

1. Are there weapons involved? If so, what and who has them? Where exactly is the weapon?
2. Any threats made to responding units?

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3. Any drug or alcohol issues? (Illegal or prescription)
4. Psychiatric issues (violence, 5150)
5. Is there a potential for a Suicide-By-Cop situation? What is the subject's intent?
 - a. If you suspect Suicide by Cop by the caller, ask, "What do you intend to do?" Or, "Are you going to hurt yourself? Have you hurt yourself? Are you planning on killing yourself? If so, how?" Those questions will not cause a person to commit suicide. They can have the opposite effect by becoming a topic of discussion for you and serving as rapport builders.
 - b. Questions that will help determine if this is a potential Suicide by Cop.
 - 1) Has the person made a threat to kill police or be killed by the police?
 - 2) Has the person ever been in prison before (high risk for 3rd strikers)?
 - 3) History of 5150?
 - 4) History of resisting arrest?
 - 5) Is the subject armed?

D. LEARNING ACTIVITY: Pass the Marble Please (LA6)

Purpose: To stress working under time constraints and a dispatcher's role in call taking.

Procedures: Small group activity

- a) Divide the class into groups with an equal number of people in each group.
- b) Provide everyone with a paperclip.
- c) Provide each group with 1 marble.
- d) Within each group the marble is to be passed to the person on the left using only the paper clip. (Hands cannot be used).
- e) If the marble falls, the group must work together to scoop up the marble using only the paperclips before continuing to pass the marble down the line.
- f) The first group to successfully complete pass the marble to each person once is to stand up.
- g) When the first group stands up the game is over.
- h) **Discuss**
 - a) The importance of working as a team.
 - b) Compare the difficulty of passing and receiving the marble under stressful time constraints with a dispatcher's role in call taking.
 - c) The effect of time restrictions on events and how the team coped.
- i) **Ask:** Did any members of the team think outside the box and alter their paperclip for a more successful effort?

VII. BEYOND THE BASICS: ADVANCED CALL-TAKING TECHNIQUES (60 minutes)

A. What is Active Listening?

1. Active listening is the foundation of outstanding communicators. In active listening you focus on listening for ideas, not facts. You listen for useful information and are not distracted by emotions, arousing words, phrases, or inflammatory statements. The caller is often in an emotional situation and this

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will be reflected in their communications. Force concentration on the message, not the messenger.

2. What “Active Listening” is NOT:
 - a. Advising, giving solutions or suggestions, lecturing
 - b. Judging, criticizing or blaming.
 - c. Ordering, directing or commanding.
3. Use “Active Listening” to listen
 - a. For important information about the subject, the location, the causes, the situation in general.
 - b. For ideas, not just facts.
 - c. To adapt your approach to the caller and the situation.
 - d. For the emotion behind the words. You cannot get to the “story” until you get through the emotions surrounding the story.
4. Do not pass judgment on what they say. Instead, use your active listening skills to paraphrase them—reflect the words and emotions you are hearing.
5. Explain “Active Listening”
 - a. **Point Out** the four types of Active Listening to be used in the learning activity.
 - 1) Distractions
 - 2) Rehearsing
 - 3) Filtering
 - 4) Judging
 - b. **Point Out** the seven techniques for active listening to be used in the learning activity.
 - 1) Minimal Encouragement
 - 2) Paraphrasing (restating)
 - 3) Emotion Labeling
 - 4) Mirroring (or Reflecting)
 - 5) Open-Ended Question
 - 6) Closed-Ended Questions
 - 7) Effective Pauses

C. LEARNING ACTIVITY: Who’s Listening (LA7)

- a. Instructor will play a video of the NBC drama “ER” or “Third Watch”. The clip contains many scenes of active and non-active listening.
- b. The students are advised to pick out the different techniques, both effective and ineffective, used in the scenes.
- c. The students should refer to the active listening handout to assist them in identifying the four types of active listening and/or the seven techniques for active listening.
- d. Upon completion of the video, class will be broken up into small groups to record the responses and then report to the class on their findings.

VIII. CHALLENGING CALLERS

(60 minutes)

- A. With a hesitant, passive or frightened caller, use open-ended questions.
 1. This helps to get and keep them talking.
 2. Yes/No questions tend to shut down a conversation. Use these when you need to be more in control of the conversation or you need immediate answers.
- B. Find rapport builders to “connect” with callers

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1. By finding something to “connect” with you hope to create a level of trust and a level of support for the subject.
 2. Wherever possible, try to follow the lead of the caller. Grab onto something he or she says and “go with that”.
- C. Use reassuring statements with angry or hostile callers
1. Talk to me about what is happening.
 2. How can I help you? Tell me what I can do to help you.
 3. Could you tell me about it?
- D. Avoid landmines
1. “Calm down”. Can be used but it’s all in how you say it. “You need to calm down!” can antagonize whereas, “I need you to take a breath and calm yourself” may be accepted more readily.
 2. “It can’t be that bad.” “You think you’ve got it bad, listen to this...”
 3. “Don’t you think you’re overreacting?”
 4. “I understand”
- E. **LEARNING ACTIVITY:** Challenging Callers

Purpose: Reinforce techniques used for different types of challenging callers

Procedures: Small group activity

1. Divide the class into groups with an equal number of people in each group.
2. Each group is given a type of Challenging Caller, from the list below.
 - a) Hostile
 - b) Intoxicated
 - c) Mentally Unstable
 - d) Angry
 - e) Hysterical
 - f) Children
 - g) Elderly
 - h) Evasive
3. Allow each group 5 minutes to scribe specific techniques to deal with the assigned caller type.
4. Have each group present their answer to the entire class.

Expected Response:

- a. Hostile:
 - 1) Courteous
 - 2) Do not yell back
 - 3) Speak quietly
 - 4) Refrain from profanity
- b. Angry:
 - 1) Realize they are not angry with you
 - 2) Be sympathetic
 - 3) Active Listening
- c. Hysterical:
 - 1) Suggest a couple of deep breaths
 - 2) Say something reassuring, repeat if necessary
 - 3) Calm yet decisive voice
 - 4) Firm take charge
 - 5) Use caller’s name
- d. Intoxicated:

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- 1) Do not disregard the caller
- 2) Maintain Professionalism
- 3) Include information in the call
- e. Mentally Unstable:
 - 1) Describe the activity that leads you to suspect a mental problem
 - 2) Do not disregard the caller, their request may be bona fide
- f. Children:
 - 1) Do not assume they are playing on the phone
 - 2) Direct and simple questions
 - 3) Be patient, take your time
 - 4) Use language easily understood
 - 5) Be cautious that you do not lead them into a response
- g. Elderly:
 - 1) Sympathy
 - 2) Respect
 - 3) Clear and concise diction
 - 4) Refer to the caller as sir or ma'am
- h. Evasive (withhold or give false information):
 - 1) Use close-ended questions
 - 2) Reassure caller
 - 3) Do not demand information

5. Provide a copy of *“Techniques to Use with Challenging Callers”* to each student.

IX. BUILDING AND COMPOSING TEXT

(2 hours)

1. **LECTURETTE:** Information dispatcher needs to send an appropriate response.
 - a. The dispatcher needs to know WHAT is occurring WHERE and WHEN (the time element)
 - b. Your TEXT should support your call classification (CAD call type).
 - c. Use your “ABCs”- be accurate, brief and concise in forming your text. Remember the filtering that takes place and the information that is lost along the way.
 - d. Once dispatch has been made and you have more information from the caller, it is important to keep the dispatcher updated.
2. **LEARNING ACTIVITY:** Building and Composing Text (LA9)

Purpose: To develop an action plan that allows the dispatcher to build a scenario with the information gathered.

Procedures: Small Group Activity

- a. Provide each student with a “Building and Composing Text” handout that outlines how text should be composed.
- b. Break the class up into groups of 4-5 students
- c. Distribute two jumbled scenarios for service to each group.
- d. The students will be given no more than 10 minutes to rearrange the text in a logical order.
- e. Each group, one at a time, will go to the board and write the location, call type, and logical text.

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- f. Each group will explain their logic to the class.
- C. Handling Other Calls & Responsibilities
 - 1. **Ask:** Do you have any options to not put the caller on hold?
 - 2. Expected Responses
 - a. Advise the caller to remain on the line with you while you respond to an officer's question related to the caller's incident. Let the caller know you will be speaking with an officer regarding their call.
 - b. Encourage the caller to keep you apprised of any changes in the situation while you attend to another officer or operator
 - 3. **Ask:** Can you ask for help?
 - 4. Expected Responses
 - a. Yes. The worse that can happen is others discover, you're human
 - b. You can multi-task other responsibilities
 - c. Suggesting that non-emergency callers call back after explaining that you are working an emergency.
 - d. Taking the name and number of non-emergency callers and calling them back.
 - e. Screen related phone calls very carefully for new information.
 - 5. **LEARNING ACTIVITY:** Prioritizing Tasks (LA10)

Purpose: To allow the students an opportunity to develop well-thought out plans for prioritization of multiple tasks

Procedures: Small Group Activity

- a) Break the class into groups of 4-5 students.
 - b) Distribute 10 dispatch task scenario cards.
 - 1) 9-1-1 Lines Ringing
 - 2) 7 Digit Emergency Line Ringing
 - 3) Direct Line from Alarm Company
 - 4) Officer Request for Warrant Check
 - 5) Non-Emergency Line Ringing
 - 6) Teletype to Check
 - 7) Citizen at The Front Desk
 - 8) Giving Citizen Directions
 - 9) Fax to Send
 - 10) Personal Phone Call
 - c) In their groups, the class will prioritize the scenarios by order of importance.
 - d) Have each group prioritize their tasks on the board and share them with the class explaining their logic.
 - e) The above ten tasks are listed in the suggested order of priority
- D. Customer Service & Public Perception

- 1. **LEARNING ACTIVITY:** Customer Service Means (LA11)

Purpose: To allow the students an opportunity to develop well-thought out plans for prioritization of multiple tasks

Procedures: Small Group Activity

- a. Divide the class into groups of three to five students.

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- b. Give each group an envelope containing the contents of the handout.
 - 1) Doing, extraordinary things, extraordinarily well
 - 2) Going, beyond, what's expected
 - 3) Adding, value and integrity, to every interaction
 - 4) Being, at your best, with every customer
 - 5) Discovering, new ways, to delight, those you serve
 - 6) Surprising, yourself, with how much, you can do
 - 7) Taking care, of the customer, like you would
 - 8) Take care of your grandmother
- c. Write "Customer Service Means..." on a blank easel pad or wipe board
- d. Explain that in the envelope are phrases that, when assembled, provide seven definitions of customer service. Their job is to work together as a team to assemble the phrases in a way that completes the sentence "Customer Service Means..." Each phrase must be a complete, logical sentence. They must use all the pieces and the pieces can only be used once. (The eight items listed below represent the completed sentences)
- e. If the groups are slow to get started, advise them to start each phrase with a verb such as "finding"
- f. Allow 5 minutes for the teams to complete the assembly of the phrases.
- g. Facilitate a class discussion:
 - 1) **Ask:** If all the definitions are true
Expected Response
 - a) Yes
 - 2) **Ask:** Which definitions do the students like best
Expected Response will differ amongst each class
 - 3) **Ask:** Why isn't there one common definition?
Expected Response
 - a) Customer service may mean different things to different people based on their personal/past experiences, past training or company they've worked for, their morals/values, and their expectations.
2. You are the first contact and sometimes the ONLY contact this citizen may have with you.
3. The image you portray can leave a lasting impression on the caller.
 - a. This image affects you and your agency, other dispatchers and even the entire public safety spectrum.
 - b. Can you afford to have a "bad day"? Remember that your bad day is recorded for others to critique.
4. Callers that complain about an incident with a call-taker generally are angry about HOW something was said, not WHAT was said.
 - a. Your tone and delivery are essential elements of your communication.
5. **LEARNING ACTIVITY:** Now You Hear It, Now You Don't (LA12)

Purpose: To allow the students to judge techniques that work toward building a rapport with callers to obtain necessary information

Procedures: Class Activity

- a. The instructor will play two audiotapes depicting good and bad examples of customer service.
- b. The participants will then critique the audiotapes.

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c. Ask:

- 1) What techniques (good and bad) did each call taker utilize?

Expected Responses:

- a) The good call taker was patient, concerned, and asked pertinent questions. Not affected by the hang-ups. Helpful and friendly. She seemed happy to be of service.
 - b) In the example of the bad call, the call taker came across as bored, uninterested, short (cutting the caller off), almost irritated.
- 2) How do the attitudes and/or tones displayed by the call taker affect the caller?

Expected Responses:

- a) With the good call taker, the caller was more apt to providing the needed information and was in turn, polite. The caller's demeanor reflected that of the call-taker, polite and calm.
- b) The caller who experienced the bad call taker may have walked away with less than a positive image of law enforcement.

6. Discuss Relevant Referrals

- a. Always try to take the approach of telling your caller what you can do for them; not what you cannot do for them.
- b. Sometimes you need to take the extra step to explain how something works instead of just passing on a number or agency name. Learn the resources for your city, county or local area.

X. CONCLUSION: Reinforce the learning point from the One-day course with Jeopardy (60 minutes)

5. LEARNING ACTIVITY: Jeopardy

Purpose: The students will review the key points presented in the day's lesson.

Procedures: Class Activity

1. Teams or individuals will earn points for correct answers. Once all the questions have been asked and the board is clear, the points will be tallied to determine a winner.
2. Break the room up into three even groups
3. Provide each group with a ring in bell or buzzer
4. Determine which group will start the game
5. Have the starting group pick a category and question based on points
6. The facilitator will read the question picked aloud to the room
7. The first group to ring in and answer the question correctly wins the points
8. **Ask** the class the following as the categories come up on the screen:

The Importance of Call-Taking

\$100 A slogan used to show the time it takes to get information can make the difference between life and death.

Answer: What is... Dispatchers save seconds, seconds save lives?

\$200 Dispatchers use this format to contribute to the success of convictions for the prosecution.

Answer: What is good documentation on the call for service?

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- \$300 Using a steady, calm professional approach involving direct questioning of a hysterical caller.
Answer: What is controlling the conversation?
- \$400 As a representative of your agency you are responsible for your decisions.
Answer: What is vicarious liability?
- \$500 This will help protect you against lawsuits.
Answer: What is knowing and following your agency's policies and procedures?

Call-Taking Elements

- \$100 What, where, who, when, and why.
Answer: What are the standard questions a dispatcher asks?
- \$200 Communities and law enforcement working together to solve problems.
Answer: What is Community Oriented Policing?
- \$300 Callers in dangerous situations expect this solution.
Answer: What are dispatcher instructions/advice
- \$400 Misinformation and criticism of police events come from them.
Answer: What is the media?
- \$500 An expectation this group can solve all problems.
Answer: What is the police/sheriff department? Or, What is Law Enforcement?

Ground Rules of Call-Taking

- \$100 Not all calls that come in on this line are emergencies.
Answer: What is 911?
- \$200 If your caller rambles this will help you focus his/her responses.
Answer: What are direct questions? Or, What are close-ended questions? Or, What are yes/no questions?
- \$300 When you do this it is not uncommon for the caller to think you are no longer on the line
Answer: What impressions do long pauses or silence give the caller?
- \$400 When you have the same callers phoning in the same problems, this can be difficult to maintain.
Answer: What is empathy and/or patience?
- \$500 You need to project this to the public.
Answer: What is confidence and competence?

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Basic Concepts & Skills for Call-Taking

- \$100 The ability to not have someone repeat information numerous times.
Answer: What are keen listening skills?
- \$200 The 3-part formula that forms the basis of primary questions.
Answer: What is WHERE-WHAT-WHEN?
- \$300 M/W, 6'1", 200, blue baseball cap, dark jacket, shooting an AK 47.
Answer: What is a suspect description?
- \$400 Source of calls that often lack details and accurate information.
Answer: What are second and third-hand callers?
- \$500 What do the letters in the acronym CYMBALS stand for?
Answer: Color, Year, Make, Body type, Anything else, License, State

Citizen and Officer Safety Issues

- \$100 In situations where the caller is in danger the dispatcher should do this
Answer: What is keep the caller on the phone, do not disconnect?
- \$200 This advice can help decisions of dispatcher when caller feels unsafe staying on the phone.
Answer: What is telling the caller to put the phone down but leave line open so dispatcher can hear background noise?
- \$300 For a suicidal subject what topic can create rapport.
Answer: What are suicide related questions?
- \$400 This person is the true victim in a SBC incident.
Answer: Who is the officer involved in the shooting?
- \$500 SBC is classified as this by the coroner until the investigation is complete.
Answer: What is a homicide?

Beyond the Basics, Advanced Call-Taking Techniques

- \$100 TDD stands for.
Answer: What is Telecommunications Device for the Deaf?
- \$200 A 911 call without ALI information.
Answer: What is a cell-phone call?
- \$300 711
Answer: What is a way to contact the California Relay Center?
- \$400 The foundation of outstanding communicators.

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Answer: What is active listening?

\$500 The number of languages available for translation from the Language Line.

Answer: What is 140?

Building and Composing Text

\$100 The order in which you describe a vehicle.

Answer: What is CYMBAL?

\$200 You start the text of a call with this.

Answer: What is a summary (of what occurred or the complaint)?

\$300 The reason we want to find out and include a time element in our text.

Answer: What helps determine the type of response a patrol unit should make?

\$400 Asking questions about these are critical in the decision-making process of officers responding to a call.

Answer: What are weapons, alcohol or drug use?

\$500 The order in which we describe a subject.

Answer: What is name, race, sex, age, height/weight, hair/eye, clothing head to toe, inside to outside?

Handling Other Calls & Responsibilities & Customer Service & Public Perceptions

\$100 The job of a dispatcher always involves this.

Answer: What is multi-tasking?

\$200 This is an option to putting a non-emergency call on hold for an extended time.

Answer: What is obtaining their number and calling the caller back? Or, What is asking for help from a co-worker? Or, what is suggesting that the caller call back later?

\$300 Your encounter with a citizen can leave a _____ impression.

Answer: What is lasting?

\$400 This is more important than what you say.

Answer: What is HOW you say it?

\$500 These two things can affect the caller.

Answer: What is attitude and tone? Or, What is tone and delivery?

- B. Closing Comments
1. Closing Remarks
 2. Complete course evaluation