



LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT  
**TACTICAL CONCEPTS**  
Tactics Training Overview

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Tactical Concept No. 2

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## CONTACT AND COVER

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this Tactical Concepts – Tactics Training Overview is to guide officers regarding techniques for Contact and Cover roles. Police officers engaging in field activities are involved in a variety of situations ranging from routine to life-threatening. Understanding and practicing Contact and Cover roles will maximize the potential for proper decision-making with a central focus on officer safety, particularly in high-stress, potentially life-threatening incidents.

Contact and Cover is a tactical concept where officers' responsibilities are divided into two distinct and separate roles to maximize safety for all involved. Although they are similar concepts, Cover and Concealment refer to environmental features that provide officers protection or camouflage for an officer's position.

### DEFINITIONS

Contact Officer: The officer with the primary responsibility for conducting most or all the active portion of any interaction with the public, whether with a suspect or any other individual.

Cover Officer: The officer with the primary responsibility of monitoring and protecting the contact officer so that they can conduct an interaction safely.

Cover: Any physical barrier that can deflect or stop a suspect's weapon or attack.

**Note:** It is important to consider that cover can be in the form of full cover which provides complete protection from a suspect's attack, or partial cover which does not provide the officer with complete protection.

Concealment: Anything that cannot deflect or stop a suspect's weapon or a projectile but prevents a suspect from seeing or making visual contact with an officer.

## TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Contact Officer is generally the officer who initiates field activities and is responsible for conducting the essential business required, which can include, but is not limited to:

- Managing the actions of the suspect or subject;
- Conducting thorough systematic searches of persons, places, and vehicles;
- Recovering evidence;
- Recording necessary suspect or incident information;
- Handling radio communication;
- Writing citations; and,
- Alerting the Cover Officer of important tactical information.



The Cover Officer is primarily responsible for:

- Positioning him or herself in such a way as to cut off any avenue of escape, while not interfering with, or coming between, the contact officer and the subject of the interaction;
- Protecting the Contact Officer from harm;
- Protecting the Contact Officer from possible interference;
- Maintaining constant observation of the overall situation; and,
- Providing a command presence to dissuade violent attacks, either from the subject of the interaction or from some other source(s).

**Note:** The Cover Officer generally should not be required to recover evidence, search suspects/subjects, or engage in unnecessary conversations with either suspects or bystanders.

The majority of contacts with suspects become hazardous during cursory searches for weapons or when suspects are being handcuffed. Because of the inherent danger of these situations, the Contact Officer should conduct the search or the handcuffing while the Cover Officer acts as security. Maintaining discipline in these distinctive roles greatly adds to the overall safety of officers during these encounters. Clear communication between partners is vital in all contacts and especially in situations where the potential for danger is high.



## Switching Roles

In some instances, once the initial contact has been made, officers may decide to exchange contact and cover officer duties. This Contact/Cover switch should be

communicated verbally or through pre-arranged non-verbal communication – unless the fluidity of circumstances for the particular incident necessitate a switch without prior communication. The discretion to make such an exchange lies in the involved officers' judgment that such a switch may be beneficial and support a desirable outcome to the incident. When exchanging roles, the officer assuming the role of Cover Officer should be in position and fully prepared to respond to any sudden actions by the suspect before the original Cover Officer relinquishes their duty to take on the role of Contact Officer.

As with any situation, continuous clear communication is vital for the successful transition of roles. Partners may develop coded language in an attempt to conceal their intentions to the subject of the interaction. While not explicitly recommended or forbidden in these situations, it is important to ensure that both partners have a complete understanding of their exchanged messages. Officers should be mindful that using anything other than clear and concise standard language has the potential to cause confusion and miscommunication.

## Positioning

The exact positioning of the Contact Officer and the Cover Officer will vary according to the situation and circumstances of an incident. The Contact Officer is expected to conduct the majority of any interaction with the public and it is reasonable to expect that their positioning will change frequently. Using tactical concepts, the Contact Officer should attempt to limit their vulnerability by positioning themselves to avoid moving between the Cover Officer and the suspect/subject.

The Cover Officer should position themselves in an effort to have a clear and unobstructed view of the suspect/subject and the Contact Officer while avoiding crossfire situations. If possible, the Cover Officer should control the likeliest routes of escape of the suspect/subject. The Cover Officer should make every effort to maintain a position that allows them to monitor the Contact Officer and the suspect, while also maintaining an overall view of the surrounding area. The Cover Officer should always be aware of the Contact Officer's location and adjust his or her positioning accordingly.

**Note:** A standard practice utilized is triangulation. This approach involves officers approaching a suspect from opposite sides and at an approximately 90-degree angle to each other.



## Multiple Contact and Cover Officers

Some major crime scenes or disturbances involving several suspects may require the need for multiple Contact and Cover Officers. This is particularly true when two or more

suspects must be separated, witnesses individually questioned, or when a potentially hostile crowd presents a threat of interference. If the officers initiating the contact believe they need assistance with the interaction, they should request additional resources at their location.

The primary unit should inform any responding officer(s) of the nature of the incident, as well as what their needs are, and specify any roles they wish the responding units to assume. Either the primary Contact Officer or a supervisor should assign contact and cover duties as appropriate. Assignments should be as clear and specific as the situation permits. If the primary unit is unable to provide direction, additional personnel should automatically assume the role of Cover Officer unless otherwise instructed.

## **CONCLUSION**

The challenges involved in field activities are numerous and they may often be dangerous. It is impossible to predict the outcome of any field activity, but discipline in maintaining the roles of Contact Officer and Cover Officer provides a strong tactical foundation for conducting these activities. Being mindful of, and adhering to, the concepts of Contact Officer and Cover Officer in all interactions is vital for ensuring the safety of all personnel involved in these encounters.

### **Important Reminder**

**Deviation from these basic concepts sometimes occurs due to the fluid and rapidly evolving nature of law enforcement encounters and the environment in which they occur. Deviations may range from minor, typically procedural or technical, to substantial deviations from Department tactical training. Any deviations are to be explained by the involved officer(s), and justification for substantial deviation from Department tactical training shall be articulated and must meet the objectively reasonable standard of the Department's Use of Force Policy.**

Field Training Services Unit  
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