

WHO?

1. Who is the decedent?
2. Who discovered the decedent/incident?
3. Who reported the death?
4. Who saw or heard anything of importance to this death investigation?
5. Who is the decedent's next-of-kin?
6. Who pronounced the decedent dead?
7. Who was the subject's physician?
8. Who is investigating this death from other agencies (e.g., detectives, fire marshal, OSHA inspectors)?

WHAT?

1. What happened?
2. What crime, if any, was committed?
3. What were the actions of the decedent?
4. What were the actions of "others" who may have contributed to the death?
5. What do the witnesses know?
6. What injuries/marks, artifacts, clothing, and personal property were noted on the body?
7. What evidence was found on the body?
8. What was the decedent's estimated time of death?
9. What instruments/weapons possibly were used?
10. What cause-of-death information was found on the body?
11. What was the decedent's past medical/psychiatric/social/family history?
12. What was the decedent's state of health when he/she was last seen?
13. What substances or medications may have been involved in this death?
14. What was the environment at the time the decedent was injured/discovered?
15. What was the decedent's employment status/history?
16. What was the decedent's previous involvement with law enforcement agencies?

WHERE?

1. Where was the body discovered (exact location, including address)?
2. Where did the death occur (at this location, or at another place)?
3. Where was the decedent last seen?

4. Where did the injury occur, if not at the scene where the decedent was pronounced dead?
5. Where were the witnesses during the incident?

WHEN?

1. When was the decedent discovered?
2. When was the decedent last seen alive?
3. When did the decedent first develop difficulty (e.g., one-week history of chest pains, abducted three hours before being discovered dead)?
4. When was the decedent pronounced dead?
5. When were the police and death investigator notified of the death?
6. When did the investigator arrive at the scene?
7. When was the next-of-kin notified?

HOW?

1. How did the decedent die?
2. If it was a homicide, how was it committed?
3. How did the decedent get to the death scene?
4. How long has the decedent been dead?
5. How long after the injury did the decedent survive?
6. How did the subject sustain the injuries?

WHY?

1. Why was the decedent at this location?
2. If there was a crime, why was it committed?
3. Why was this particular weapon/instrument used?
4. Why did this death occur at this time?
5. Why was the decedent found at this time?

This list is not complete, because each death investigation is unique. However, the list should provide a starting point for the investigator to gather information that will be placed into the narrative report. Unnecessarily long or excessively detailed reports may be detrimental to the investigation and forensic case. The most important thing to remember is that the report must be accurate, thorough, unbiased, and clearly written in a timely fashion.

Examples of several death investigation narrative reports (natural, suicide, accident, and homicide) are included here for your information.