



*Improving Observation Skills  
on Campus*

**Faculty, Staff and Students**

**Safety Training Mini-Course**

**UNIVERSITY CRIME WATCH**  
[www.universitycrimewatch.org](http://www.universitycrimewatch.org)

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## WELCOME

Welcome to the UNIVERSITYCRIMEWATCH.org.  
"Improving Observation Skills on Campus" training course.

This mini-course is specifically designed for college or university faculty, staff and students who want to improve their observation skills.

On college and university campuses throughout the country, students, faculty and staff are being empowered and mobilized as they participate in University Crime Watch and other proactive partnerships with their campus security, university police department or local law enforcement agency.

## OBSERVATION SKILLS

**Course Objectives:** In this course participants will learn:

- the importance of being observant
- observation skills that can be employed in University Crime Watch
- that observation is the first step in reporting incidents

Now more than ever, with our nation's new emphasis on both crime and terrorism awareness, citizens are needed to come forward and provide valuable information. Remember: don't be shy - your job is simply to report, and law enforcement will take your call seriously and check out the situation. What you see and report may be invaluable and may save lives, so your reporting must be as accurate as possible.

## OBSERVATION SKILLS – WHAT TO OBSERVE

Before we discuss how to properly observe people, vehicles and incidents that may affect us, we should learn what to observe.

### Physical Setting –

- What is the specific location?
- What is the time of day?
- What is the date or day of the week?

### People –

- What do they look like?
- How are they acting?
- How many of them are there?

### Slide 1

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Training Series

### Slide 2

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Observation Skills

Course Objectives

- Participants will
  - learn the importance of being observant;
  - learn observational models that can be employed in University Crime Watch;
  - understand that observation is the first step in reporting incidents.

### Slide 3

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Observation Skills

What to observe:

- Physical setting
  - Location
  - Time of day
  - Date or day of the week
- People
  - Appearance
  - Behavior
  - Number
- Incidents
  - Type
  - Location
  - Time
  - Date
- Signs of trouble
  - Unusual activity
  - Suspicious behavior
  - Unusual sounds
  - Unusual smells
  - Unusual sights

Routines – Were there any recurring patterns or routines? How often did they occur? Who was involved?

Specific Items – What other factors did you notice that you think might be important? Be as specific as possible.

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## OBSERVATION SKILLS - STUDY

Look at the picture for 15 seconds.

## OBSERVATION SKILLS – RECALL

*Using the questions shown here, and not looking at the previous slide again, answer the questions as completely and accurately as possible.*

- What was the name on the lead car?
- About how many cars were in the picture?
- Was anyone hurt?
- What color was the damaged vehicle (or vehicles)?
- What type of damage was there to the vehicle (or vehicles)?
- Where did the accident occur?

Observing an event – especially something as dramatic as this – can be traumatic. Most people will focus on, or “zero in” on the accident itself and not pay attention to what might be additional important elements of the event.

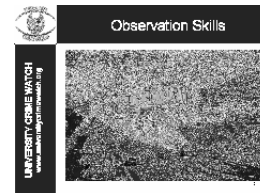
If this accident happened on a public street, observers would be looking for factors that might be important, such as the number of occupants, the description of the occupants, or other important information such as the license plate number or specific vehicle descriptors.

## HOW TO OBSERVE PEOPLE AND VEHICLES

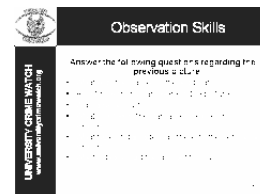
One of the keys to a successful University Crime Watch program is recognizing the importance of using good observation skills to keep your campus safe. In the following slides, we will present information that will help you improve your observation skills when observing people and vehicles.

The first step always is to remain calm. Often in stressful situations, we allow our fears or nerves to take control.

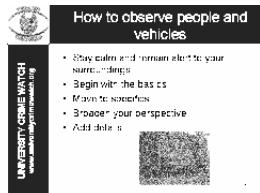
### Slide 4



### Slide 5



### Slide 6



It is crucial to stay calm, to remain in control of your senses, and to be alert to your surroundings.

Never place yourself in danger when you are observing possible suspicious or criminal activity.

Remember, stay calm and remain alert to your surroundings.

## PEOPLE: BEGIN WITH THE BASICS

When observing people, start with the basics: gender, race, and approximate age. Although these categories may seem broad, it is amazing how many people can't even describe the most fundamental individual characteristics.

Repeat this process for all people observed (for example: "three Hispanic females about 15 years of age.") Once you have made a mental note – or better yet, taken a moment to write down the information – move on to notice specific information.

Begin with the primary actor – the one who appears to be leading or controlling the incident – and then observe any others.

## PEOPLE: MOVE TO SPECIFICS

Make note of specific identifiers such as height, weight, hair color, clothing description (shirt, pants, shoes styles and color).

Once again, repeat this process as necessary for any other individuals you are observing.

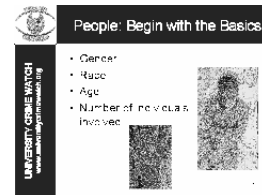
## PEOPLE: BROADEN YOUR PERSPECTIVE

When you have recorded this information, take a moment to re-orient yourself to the entire event. Stay alert and begin broadening your perspective.

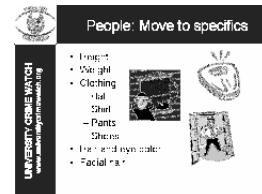
Often observers can become myopic or have "tunnel vision" when an incident occurs. This can be extremely dangerous and can significantly reduce the amount of information that you observe.

Take a deep breath, step back if possible, and broaden your perspective. What other events are occurring? Who else is affected? What is the overall situation?

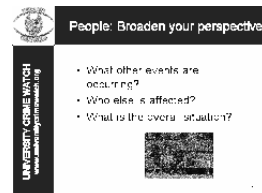
Slide 7



Slide 8



Slide 9



## PEOPLE: ADD DETAILS

Finally, the last step is to observe any other detailed information that may be beneficial to officers or investigators.

What details can you add? Were there vehicles involved? Witnesses to the incident? What was the location of the activity, the direction of travel, or the outcome of the incident?

## VEHICLE: BEGIN WITH THE BASICS

Vehicles can actually be more difficult to describe because of the similarity between models by various manufacturers, and the lack of knowledge about automotive designs by many observers. Many people can't distinguish between a Ford and a Chevy, while others cannot tell the difference between one foreign car and another.

When it comes to vehicles, the only way to improve your observation skills is to spend time learning about the various makes, models, styles and types of vehicles on the road today.

As observers, you may want to develop tools to help yourselves when describing vehicles. Many vehicles have a distinctive symbol or logo, and studying such symbols can help you recognize and identify the type of vehicle involved.

## VEHICLE SYMBOLS

You may already recognize more vehicle identifiers than you realize.

How many of these vehicle model identifiers do you recognize? Can you name them all?

Answers are on the following page.

### Slide 10

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People: Add details

- Vehicles involved
- Witnesses
- Location
- Direction of travel
- Outcome of the incident

### Slide 11

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Vehicle: Begin with the basics

- Make  
Ford, Chevrolet, Dodge, VW, Volvo, Lexus, Honda, Nissan, Toyota, etc.
- Model  
Mustang, Maxima, Expedition, Ford, Accord, etc.

### Slide 12

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Vehicle symbols

How many of these vehicle symbols do you recognize?

- # 1 – Chevrolet
- # 2 – Pontiac
- # 3 – Ford Mustang
- # 4 – Mercedes
- # 5 – Dodge
- # 6 – Toyota
- # 7 – Chrysler

## VEHICLES: MOVE TO SPECIFICS

Once you have established the make and model of the vehicle, you can move to specific details such as body style, color, and overall appearance.

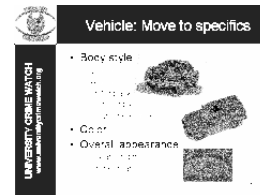
Is the vehicle a 2-door or a 4-door? A hatchback or convertible? Is it off-road or showing a 4-wheel drive designation? What is the color? What is the overall appearance – clean or dirty? Does it have primer marks?

## VEHICLE: ADD DETAILS

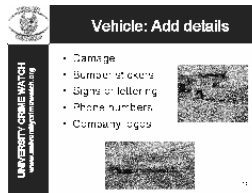
To complete your picture of the vehicle, add as many details as possible, such as whether there is any damage to the vehicle. If so, does the damage appear to be old (rusty) or new? Describe any bumper stickers, or signs or lettering that you notice on the vehicle. Was there a phone number shown to use to report accidents or comment on driving? Was there a company logo on the vehicle, and can you describe it?

At this point you should also add any details about the overall incident involving the vehicle or the environment of the scene. Were there multiple vehicles? What time of day was it? What were the weather conditions? What was the direction of travel? Did you see the occupants, and can you provide descriptions of them?

### Slide 13



### Slide 14



## IMPROVING YOUR OBSERVATION SKILLS

There are numerous ways to improve your overall observation skills. One of the best is simply to practice by observing various events as you go through your day, and then recalling the circumstances in a manner that would be most beneficial to others during an investigation.

Other practices to assist with your observation skills include staying calm and being patient when observing an event. If you become over-anxious or unduly upset, you may not be able to respond or assist if you are needed to do so.

Remember to pay attention to your overall surroundings so that you can react appropriately if the circumstances should warrant it.

Always be alert to incidents that may pose harm or be potentially dangerous (such as explosions, gas leaks, group turmoil).

## POST-OBSERVATION ACTIONS

After you have observed the situation or scene, it is advisable to write down your observations to help you remember exactly what you saw. Record the date and time.

Remember that if activities appear to be unusual, suspicious or illegal, you should immediately call for assistance and let law enforcement take action.

## CONCLUSION

By practicing your observation skills, you will become more confident when observation is essential, and better prepared to assist law enforcement.

To receive additional training and materials for your UNIVERSITY CRIME WATCH group, or information on conducting various campus-based activities contact University Crime Watch at 972-576-8662, or visit our website at [www.universitycrimewatch.org](http://www.universitycrimewatch.org)

### Slide 15

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#### Improving your observation skills

- Be patient and take your time
- Pay attention to your surroundings

### Slide 16

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#### Post-Observation Actions

- If possible, write down your observations as soon as possible
- Record the date and time
- If activities appear to be unusual, suspicious or illegal, call for assistance and let law enforcement take action

### Slide 17

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#### Conclusion