NOTE TAKING

When conducting interviews, interviewers must undertake a number of tasks simultaneously. Therefore it is very important that a structure exists for effectively taking notes. Using a structured system will enable the interviewer to process and respond to the quantity and quality of information received in the interview. This in turn will provide a firm basis for the questions that are to be asked to clarify or challenge the interviewees account. When interviewing suspects a tape recording will be made in accordance with PACE, however, the interviewer will still need to make notes and use them to clarify the suspects account.

One example of a notetaking system divides information from interviewees into four categories;

- **P**eople
- **L**ocation(s)
- **A**ctions
- **T**ime(s)

People

This category refers to all the people mentioned by the interviewee, which could include potential suspects or witnesses. All information given by the interviewee which might be used to identify the person in question, including any names, addresses and descriptions, should be included in this category. Where a name or address is given, details as to how the interviewee knew such information should also be included here.

Location(s)

This category refers to the scene(s) of the incident and other locations including those of the interviewee before, during and after the incident took place.

Actions

This category refers to the physical movements and verbal actions of the interviewee and all the people mentioned by the interviewee. It also refers to the description and movements of vehicles and other inanimate objects such as weapons.

Time(s)

This category refers to the times reported by the interviewee for the occurrence of the actions and in respect of the locations referred to above.

Investigators may find it useful to use one or a variety of both of the recording methods described below.

Spidergraph

This consists of a series of circles drawn to represent each topic as the interviewee introduces them. Such a topic could be a person, location or action.

Once identified, the nature of the topic is noted on the inside of the circle. PLAT (people, location, actions, times) information relating to the topic is then recorded in a clock-wise direction on a series of 'spiders legs' drawn off the circle. The 'spiders leg' can then be extended in the event of the information recorded on it leading to the disclosure of further information.

Clockface

The clockface recording method consists of a circle on the outside of which the numbers 1 to 12 are recorded to represent the hours of the day when an interviewee reports the time(s) for the occurrence of the actions and in respect of the locations.

Plus (+) and minus (-) symbols should be used in circumstances where the interviewee reports approximate time(s) preceded with phrases such as 'just before' or 'not long after'.
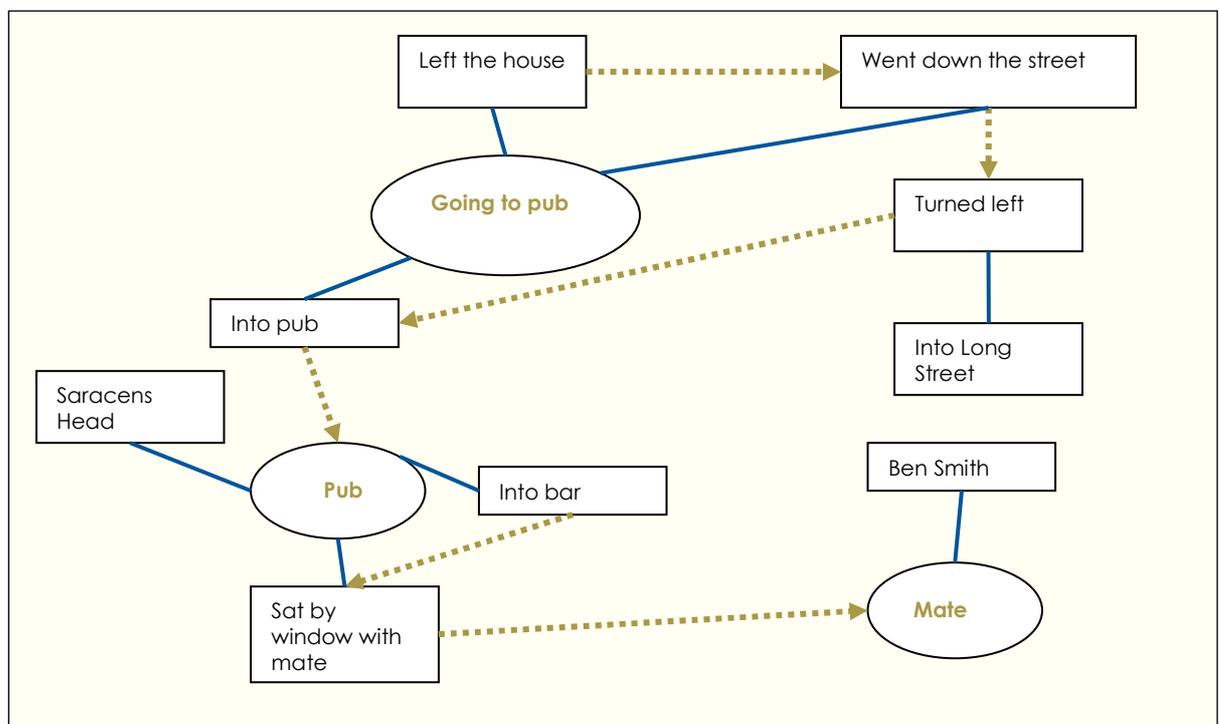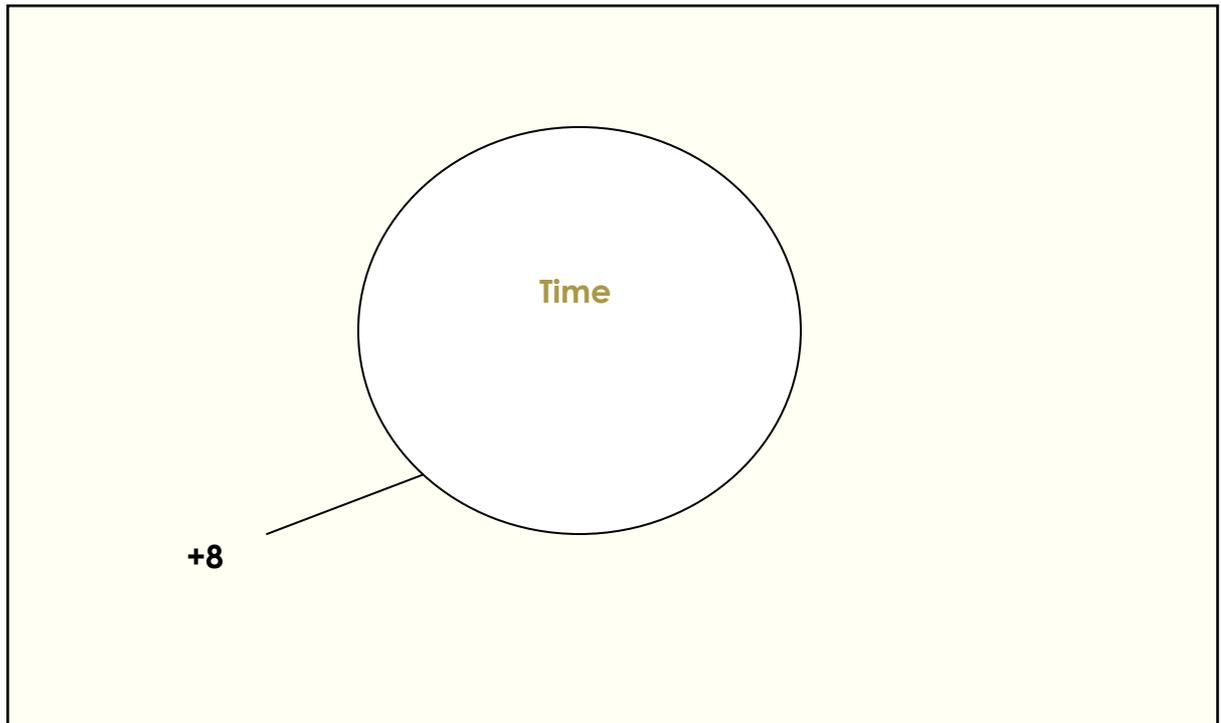
Figure X Example of a Spidergraph

Figure X Example of a Clockface

Note-taking during interviews

Having engaged the interviewee and explained the process of the interview to them, the interviewer should elicit their initial account through the use of open questions like 'tell me', 'explain to me' or 'describe to me'. The topic areas that make up the account should then be drawn on a page of paper. As a method of prioritising the topics that are to be subject of further scrutiny, the interviewer should draw a line linking each of the topics relevant to the matter under investigation to the event line as shown in Figure X Example of prioritisation of topics using an event line.

Figure X Prioritisation of topics using an event line
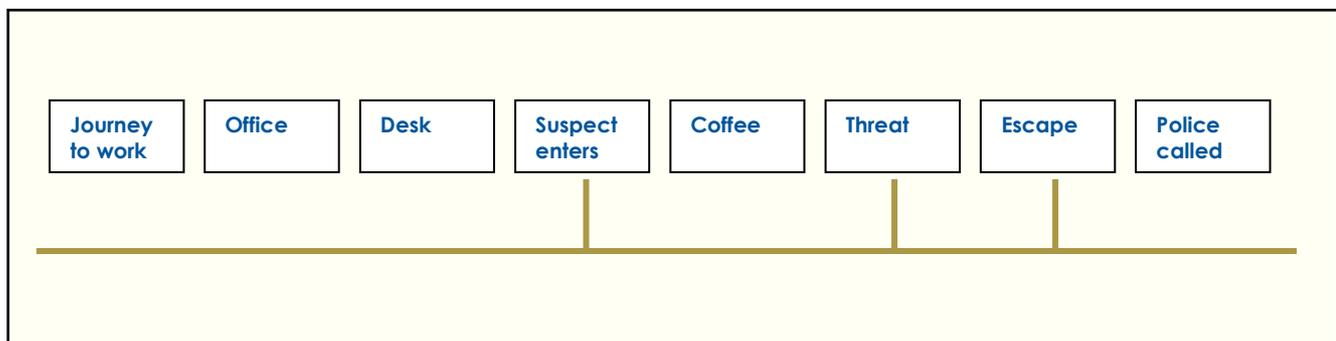
Each topic identified as relevant is explored making use of the specific questions: where, what, when, who, how and why. Information elicited through this process is recorded on a spidergraph as shown in figure X Spidergraph making use of specific questions.

Figure X Spidergraph making use of specific questions
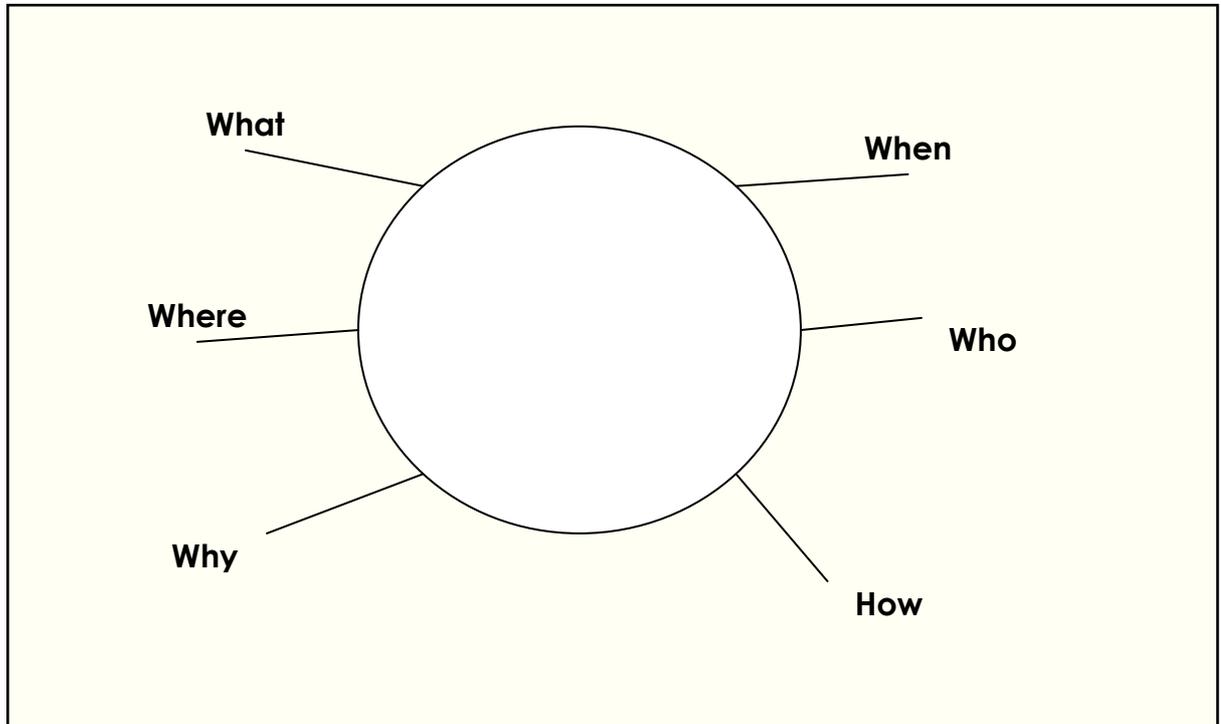
Having explored each relevant topic, the interviewer should be in a position to identify any gaps in the information by reviewing his or her notes with reference to the operating principles set out in PLAT (persons, locations, actions, times).

The construction of notes in this way should also help the interviewer to repeat the information accurately back to the interviewee in order to confirm his or her understanding of what has been said.