

ACTIVITIES LOG

PURPOSE

An activities log is strongly recommended if, in the course of a private in-home investigation, you or your team follow a structured set of tasks such as set-up, interviews, baseline sweeps, vigils, etc. Who was on surveillance duty? Which activity was done when, and how long did it take? Where in the venue did it occur? Who participated, and who didn't participate? The answers to these and similar questions are useful to document for a number of reasons.

Firstly, they help you to assess your group's time management and efficiency—not so much for the sake of micromanaging team members but, rather, in order to make wiser use of time on an investigation. The less time devoted to setup and baseline sweeps, for instance, the sooner you can get to the actual investigating, and the more time you can devote to collecting potential evidence.

Secondly, charting the activities and perambulations of your team members during an evening of hearty ghost-hunting dovetails nicely with a meta-surveillance of the investigation. (See "Surveillance Log" for additional info.) Just as you'll want to know that a strange whisper captured in your audio coincides with the surveillance log's documentation of a passing car on a wet street, it pays to know where team members are at the time when events of interest are later discovered in the review of the audio and video. One of the common problems of amateur paranormal investigating (as if, really, there's any other kind!) is that investigators may inadvertently cause their own recorded anomalies. Without a method to cross-check and contextualize these anomalies, they never discover the truth that they, themselves, are responsible for "peeing in the data pool." After many investigations where these false positives are held up as "evidence," some even start to mythologize themselves, believing they're magnets for paranormal activity. Oh, the shame of it!

Thirdly, a detailed chronicling of the investigation adds a layer of protection against liabilities. If you and your mates are investigating a public or historical venue, being able to produce documentation of your whereabouts during the evening might spare you from lawsuits and charges over vandalism, theft, damage, and heavens know what else. If you are a volunteer outreach group solicited by private residences, usually you're considered a guest of the legal occupants or homeowners and are not liable for accidentally getting the carpet smudged. What happens, though, if disappearing objects are part of the pathology of the case and things go missing on the night of the investigation? Or, what happens if you accidentally leave behind a piece of equipment? What happens if the family hamster is found to be ill the next morning, and the clients want to know where you were in their home and what you did that night? PPI usually makes it a habit of including the client in at least one EVP vigil. This is practical, in our opinion, for several reasons: 1) the clients are the ones experiencing and, in some cases, responsible for manifesting the activity; 2) the clients are interested in our investigative techniques and want to reference them when we're not there; and 3) transparency is a beautiful thing: with their own eyes, the clients get to see everything we do, and we in turn get to observe them and their interaction with one another as well as with their putative ghosts. However, not every investigative group encourages the clients to participate, preferring to operate on their own behind someone else's closed doors. Okay, we're not judging that decision, but being able to produce for your clients a log of your activities to assure them of where you were, and *weren't*, in their house on the night of the investigation, and which of your team were accounted for, is not only reassuring to your clients, it's just plain professional. Besides, most of them already feel as if an unseen stranger is bugging them; they don't need the added stress of worrying whether or not the strangers that come into their home are untrustworthy.

APPLICATION

While it's best to fill it out *during* your investigation, you should at least attempt to document your group's comings and goings from the night before while it's still fresh in memory—say, when you get up at 2:30 p.m. the next day. As with other logs, you'll want to make this one available to your team mates as a reference source when they're reviewing their collected media and data. It provides everyone one more tool to cross-reference and backdrop their findings. If you produce a final report for your clients, the activities log should probably be included; once again, this serves as, both, a courtesy and a safeguard against liability.

USING THIS FORM

Besides inputting practical information such as case number and date, the form is designed to chart activities by the time spent on them, the kind of activity performed, where in the venue this activity occurred, who among you (team members and non-members alike) participated in it, who was monitoring or surveilling the investigation during this time, and any additional observations or info that might be noteworthy for that activity.

START / END: Although fairly self-explanatory, the start/end times should be noted in a uniform style. It's acceptable to round up or down to the nearest five-minute mark. Although activities are intended to be documented in chronological order, concurrent activities should be logged separately. For example, on the night of an investigation, two PPI members might undertake baseline sweeps while three members are setting up equipment, and another member is sitting down with the client for a one-on-one interview. These should all be listed separately on the activities log, since they don't all take up the same amount of time and happen in different locations throughout the venue.

ACTIVITY AND ROOM: To help quickly identify the routine activities conducted during the preliminary and formal stages of an investigation, PPI has devised its own shorthand. These are meant specifically to represent our procedures, but you're encouraged to tailor them to your own:

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| ARV | arrival (start of the investigation) |
| BL | base-line analysis |
| BRK | rest and dining breaks for investigators |
| DEP | departure (end of the investigation) |
| EQ BD | equipment breakdown and packing |
| EQ SU | equipment unpacking and setup |
| EXT INT | exit interviews |
| FP | floor plans (drafting venue schematics, equipment positions, etc.) |
| INT | on-site interviews at the venue |
| OUTRO | valedictory interviews and discussions with the client |
| PRE INT | preliminary interviews |
| PRE WT | preparatory walkthroughs for equipment placement |
| VIG | vigils (a.k.a., EVP sessions) |
| WT | investigative walkthroughs |

Here are some of the routine abbreviations PPI uses to indicate typical locations within a home venue:

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|-------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|
| LR | living room | HWY | hallway |
| FR | family room | STR | stairs, stairway |
| KT | kitchen | DR | dining room |
| BR1 | bedroom 1 | OFC | office |
| BTH | bathroom | MR | music room |
| MB | master bedroom | GRG | garage |
| MBTH | master bathroom | PTY | pantry |

PARTICIPANTS: Participants should be noted for each activity. Predictably, PPI refers to its own investigators by their initials in order to conserve space on the form. Other participants, such as the clients, should also be included, since tracking their whereabouts during the investigation is very important. If you are an outreach group like PPI, however, and you intend to include this log in a final report, you'll probably want to scrub it of any privileged client info, such as their names.

NOTES / SURVEILLANCE DUTY: If there's anything of possible importance coinciding with an activity—a participant having to break from the activity, for example, or equipment failures, or last-minute changes to procedure—these should be noted. Since surveillance duty is something that generally occurs throughout the evening, you should also log who was on duty while investigative activities were in progress.

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| <p>ACTIVITIES LOG</p> | <p>CASE: _____</p> <p>DATE: _____</p> |
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