

THE FORENSIC EXAMINATIONS OF HANDWRITING

The forensic examination of handwriting is concerned with the identification of authorship. Do not confuse it with Graphology; this purports to deal with the determination of personality from handwriting features. There are three critical requirements for a successful examination:

- 1 The original document bearing the questioned handwriting
- 2 Adequate comparison material
- 3 Proper laboratory facilities

1. The questioned handwriting

Ideally, I must examine the original handwriting, not a copy. A photocopy, facsimile copy, carbon copy or even a photograph is a poor substitute for the original; a copy does not show all the details of the original, indeed some copying methods are sometimes used as aids to disguise forgery.

If I cannot examine the original questioned handwriting I may reach only restricted or qualified conclusions.

The quantity of handwriting is also important; it is difficult to identify very small fragments of handwriting with any certainty.

2. Genuine comparison material

Because an individual's handwriting varies from day to day, I need adequate original genuine handwriting to establish the normal range of variation. Good sources include:

- Diaries and address books
- Notebooks
- Business and private correspondence
- Cheques

Handwriting made close in time to the disputed handwriting is particularly valuable.



Photocopies of comparison handwriting alone do not constitute adequate comparison material; however, provided that original handwritings are available for the detailed primary study, copies of additional genuine handwritings can help to establish the general range of variation. So they should be submitted too.

Finally remember that, as in all forensic science, I must compare like with like. I need block capital writing to compare with block capitals, cursive writing with cursive writings, printing with printing.

If only specimen handwritings are available

Specimen handwritings, in other words handwritings made all on one occasion specifically for the purpose of examination, are generally not helpful. They are unlikely to show the full range of variation that appears naturally from day to day, because the writer made them all on one occasion. Also specimens often are not entirely natural and may even be deliberately structured to misrepresent the genuine handwritings.

But sometimes they are the only ones available for comparison. Try to ensure that they are as natural as possible. This is how you can do this:

- Do not show the individual concerned the document in question. Dictate from it instead.
- Ask the individual to write the handwriting on a number of single pieces of paper - about 12 - 20.
- As each specimen is produced remove it from sight.
- If possible ask for specimens to be completed on several different days or at least with breaks instituted between the taking of the specimens.

3. Proper laboratory facilities are essential*

I need specialised equipment to examine documents so I only do it in this Laboratory where proper facilities are available.

I will not travel to other laboratories to carry out examinations. I have equipment and instrumentation here of the highest standards, including image capture facilities that are not available elsewhere. I maintain it and have no need to share it, so my examinations can proceed effectively, quickly and efficiently.

So please send the material for examination here to this Laboratory. Do not be concerned about this. While they are with me, I shall store them in a secure safe and, unless we agree otherwise, shall only use non-destructive techniques to examine them. Your documents will not be damaged in any way.

**For further information see Information Sheet No 1 "The Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents".*

Dr Audrey Giles
Registered Forensic Practitioner
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