



## INDIANAPOLIS-MARION COUNTY FORENSIC SERVICES AGENCY

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# EVIDENCE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

## DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. ITEMS FOR SUBMISSION

The I-MCFSA Forensic Documents Section will accept evidence for examination from any law enforcement agency in Marion County pursuant to a criminal investigation. Non-criminal matters involving law enforcement entities will be accepted only upon the approval of the Lab Director. Evidence will be accepted either at the IMPD Property Room or at the I-MCFSA for agencies such as Beech Grove, Lawrence, Speedway, etc. Evidence will normally only be returned to the submitter (person or agency). All cases submitted must include a Request for Analysis form. Any questions can be addressed by calling the main laboratory number at (317)-327-3670.

### II. TYPES OF EXAMINATIONS

#### A. HANDWRITING, HAND PRINTING AND SIGNATURES

Questioned handwriting (cursive), hand printing, and signatures are compared to known writing to determine whether or not an individual was the writer.

The Laboratory Examination Report will include one of nine opinions and its corresponding definition.

Definitive conclusions include identification or elimination of the writer. These opinions are reached when there is a sufficient quantity and quality of both questioned and known writing.

If limitations exist in an examination, a qualified opinion is appropriate. Qualified opinions include highly probable, probable, indications the individual was/was not the writer, as well as could not be identified to nor eliminated as the writer of the questioned writing. Limitations may include: the submission of non-original documents; insufficient quantity of writing to demonstrate the natural variation of a writer; limited individualizing characteristics; evidence of unnatural writing; incomparable writing styles; lack of sufficient repetitions or absent characteristics; or non-contemporaneous writing.

**Generally, limitations in examination may be avoided with the submission of the original evidence and the collection of sufficient known writing from the individuals involved in a case.**

The opinion “could not be identified to nor eliminated as the writer” is rendered when there are significant limitations present that prevent analysis.

## **B. INDENTED IMPRESSIONS**

Indented impressions, generally, are impressions left on a document which has been in contact with another document during the writing process, such as when writing in a notebook or on stacks of paper. Indented impressions may be visualized with side lighting or developed by using an electrostatic detection device (EDD).

The process of using the EDD to develop indented impressions results in the production of an EDD lift, which preserves the indented impressions. If legible indented impressions develop on the lifts, a decipherment will be included in the Laboratory Examination Report. Positive lifts are returned to the customer as an item of evidence. Negative lifts are not retained.

Case examples: Probative indented impressions might include impressions of the writing from a robbery note left at the bank developing on a notebook recovered from the suspect’s car or impressions of a name and phone number on an anonymous note.

## **C. PHYSICAL MATCH**

Physical match examinations can be performed to determine if torn, cut, or shredded documents were at one time physically connected to form a larger piece of paper. Physical match examinations of materials other than paper (such as tape, glass, headlights, and paint) should be submitted to the Indiana State Police Microanalysis Unit.

Case examples: This type of examination may associate a threatening letter to the stub left behind in the notebook at a residence or associate the postage stampe on the envelope used to mail anonymous letters back to the postage stamp booklet recovered in the investigation.

## **D. INKS AND WRITING INSTRUMENTS**

Inks can be examined to classify the type of writing instrument used and determin if multiple writing instruments were used to produce the writing on the same document. Additionally, entries that have been obliterated or are not decipherable because of fading, burning, liquid exposure, overwriting, correction liquid/tape, erasure, or other means can often be recovered and deciphered.

Case examples: This type of examination may be relevant if an original check, receipt, or log is suspected of being altered or an insertion may have occurred with a similar colored ink pen.

#### **E. PRINTING PROCESSES: SOURCE, AUTHENTIC OR COUNTERFEIT**

Printed documents can be produced by many different types of devices including ink jet, toner, laser, dot-matrix, fax machine, multi-function machines, typewriters, or produced commercially.

In these examinations, it may be possible to classify the type of printing process/device used, which might aid in the search for a source and/or associate these documents back to a printing device or other documents produced from the same source. This association can be made if there are enough identifying features on the questioned and known documents/device and the known documents were collected contemporaneously. In these cases, the printing device should be collected and submitted for comparison purposes.

When collecting evidence regarding typewritten documents, it is important to know that the machine, typing element, ribbon, and/or correction ribbon can all be important. Therefore, the typewriter and all the materials associated with it should be collected from the scene.

Case example: The comparison of questioned financial, identification, or other authorized documents to genuinely produced documents from the issuing authority can be conducted to determine authenticity.

#### **F. ALTERATIONS**

An alteration to a document may be the addition, deletion, or substitution of writing, printing, and/or pages. The evidence of alterations could occur throughout a document, so the examination is multi-faceted, possibly including a detailed examination of the printing process, typography, staple holes, paper, and/or indented impressions.

#### **G. CHARRED AND LIQUID-SOAKED DOCUMENTS**

Documents that have been blackened by fire or faded through exposure to liquid or chemicals can be preserved from further degradation and an attempt can be made to decipher any written or printed material that was originally on the documents.

#### **H. MECHANICAL IMPRESSIONS**

Impressions left on documents from checkwriters, dry seals (notary seals), or rubber stamps can be examined to determine whether the impressions are from a common source, genuine, or created by a purported device.

## **I. SEQUENCING AND DATING**

Determining how and when a document was produced could corroborate or refute the story of events presented in a case. Watermarks could help determine the production date and/or manufacturer of the paper. Printing processes, fonts, or typestyles may be classified and researched to determine when they were first commercially available. Inks, printed material, and folds may be examined microscopically to determine the sequence of preparation.

## **J. COUNTERFEIT CURRENCY**

The Forensic Document Section examines U.S. Currency for suspected counterfeit. Genuine U.S. Currency contains several security features. Microscopic and alternate light source examination of the suspected currency will assist the examiner when conducting counterfeit currency examinations. Larger cases may be referred to the United States Secret Service Laboratory.

## **K. EXAMINATIONS NOT CONDUCTED**

The Forensic Document Section does not conduct chemical examinations of ink, printed material, or paper. The Forensic Document Section may be able to assist the customer in locating a laboratory that conducts these destructive examinations, when appropriate.

## **III. EXAMINATION OF REPRODUCTION COPIES**

The submission of original documentary evidence is preferable over the submission of copies. The customer should make every effort to locate the original evidence.

However, the inability to obtain original evidence should not prevent the submission of copies for examination. The Forensic Document Section will examine the best evidence available. A first-generation copy or an original scan (whichever was collected) is the best evidence when the original is not available. It should be noted that certain examinations can only be conducted with original documents, such as indented impression, ink, and printing process examinations.

## **IV. ROBBERY NOTE REFERENCE COLLECTION**

The Forensic Document Section robbery note reference collection contains images of robbery notes encountered in casework. The Indiana State Police Forensic Document Unit and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also maintain robbery note reference collections. A submitted robbery note is compared to the Forensic Document Section, the Indiana State Police FDU, and the FBI collections to see if they contain any similar notes. Associations have been made linking robbery notes from different cases to each other and/or to a suspect.

## **V. EVIDENCE PRESERVATION, HANDLING AND PACKAGING**

Every effort should be made to preserve documentary evidence in the same condition as it was collected. It is strongly advised to treat all questioned documents as though they were being protected for future latent print processing.

The evidence shall not be folded, torn, stamped, hole-punched, stapled, marked or touch unnecessarily, and protected from the addition of indented impressions. Furthermore, no additional writing should be added to the evidence, such as highlighting, circling, or underlining the questioned entries. If making a copy of the evidence for record keeping purposes, the documents should not be fed through the automatic document feeder on a photocopier. The automatic document feeder may tear the documents and add indented impressions. Copies should be made using the glass platen.

Evidence containers should be marked for identification before the documentary evidence is placed inside to avoid the addition of indented impressions. Ideally, documentary evidence should be packaged in paper envelopes, paper bags or cardboard boxes. The seals should be initialed with a felt tip marker. At no time should documentary evidence be beneath something on which writing can occur, such as on a desk or attached to a clipboard at a scene. This will add indented impressions to the documents. Evidence that is produced from a typewriter or is a copy, such as a photocopy, fax, or photograph, shall not be submitted in a plastic bag. The printed areas may adhere to the plastic surface of the bag, degrading the microscopic detail of the printed material.

Documentary evidence should be packaged in a size appropriate container, such as an envelope that is larger than the document itself. Documents that have been folded or crammed into an envelope may be cut or torn when the container is reopened.

A biological hazard sticker should be affixed to the evidence container of documents that are believed to contain biological material. If the evidence is damp or wet, it should be dried before packaging.

Each questioned item of evidence must be packaged separately. When multiple items are submitted as known of the same subject, they may be submitted in the same container.

If the questioned writing is a non-removable surface, such as a door or wall, images can be taken of the writing and these images submitted for examination. Images should be captured perpendicular to the writing and with a scale, if possible. Overall, midrange, and close-up images should be captured and should include the entire entry. Mid-range images should include a few words, and close-up images should consist of a word or a few letters. The images should be reviewed prior to the questioned entry being painted over or removed from the

surface. The actual images can be burned onto a disc or external drive and submitted as the item of evidence.

When unusual circumstances are encountered, such as charred documents, water/liquid-soaked documents, or large volume cases, contact the Forensic Documents Section for assistance.

## **VI. EVIDENCE SUBMISSION**

Documentary evidence is accepted in person either at the IMPD Property Room or at the I-MCFSA for agencies such as Beech Grove, Lawrence, Speedway, etc. Evidence will, normally, only be returned to the submitter (person or agency). All cases submitted must include a Request for Analysis form.

## **VII. OBTAINING KNOWN WRITING**

The following guidelines are to be used to obtain known handwriting and/or hand printing exemplars from a subject in an investigation:

- A.** The completion of the I-MCFSA exemplar forms **in their entirety**.
- B.** Reproduce the original conditions as closely as possible when obtaining the exemplars (e.g. the text of the writing, size of paper, and writing area, type of writing instrument, etc.).
- C.** Obtain exemplars by dictation until it is believed natural writing has been produced (the number of exemplars needed cannot be predetermined).
- D.** Never allow the subject to see either the original questioned material or a reproduction copy of it. Do not allow the subject to see or copy prior exemplars.
- E.** Remove each exemplar from the sight of the writer as soon as it is completed.
- F.** Do not provide models/demonstrations on how to write letter formations, dictate misspellings, arrangement of dates, abbreviations, etc. If asked, tell the writer to “do your best.” It may become necessary to direct the subject to use upper case letters, all hand printing, etc. toward the end of the exemplar.
- G.** When in doubt as to what writing instrument to use, a black ballpoint pen is the best choice.
- H.** Obtain the full text of the questioned writing in a word-for-word order at least once, if possible. Signatures and less extensive writing should be prepared numerous times, each time on a different sheet of paper. In hand printing cases, both upper- and lower-case samples should be obtained.
- I.** In suspected forgery cases, genuine signatures from the “victim” should also be furnished.

- J. The writer should initial or sign and date each page.
- K. The witness should initial or sign and date each page.
- L. If readily available, samples of non-request writings should be obtained (e.g. employment applications, social or business correspondence, cancelled checks, etc.).

#### **VIII. LATENT PRINT (FINGERPRINT) EXAMINATIONS**

If the evidence is to be chemically treated to develop latent prints, it should be submitted to the Forensic Document Section first. Certain evidence may be destroyed if the document is treated for latent prints before a document examination is performed. The Forensic Document Section will do all appropriate examinations and preserve the document in its original condition. It will then either be returned to the submitter or forwarded to the Latent Print Section for processing, as requested by the submitter. It is always advisable to treat all documents as though they were being protected for latent prints.

Questions should be addressed to the I-MCFSA by calling (317) 327-3670.

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