

Forensic Questioned Documents

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Forensic Questioned Documents examiners are holders of B.S. degrees in various disciplines but have demonstrated a unique ability to pay attention to very, very fine details. These details may have been obtained or observed from typed, hand printed or hand written documents. With the use of scientific equipments such as the Video Spectral Comparator and Electrostatic Detection Apparatus (ESDA) the forensic questioned document examiner can render scientific opinions in courts of law.

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Forensic Document Examination is the study/examination of any form of written/machine generated communication whose authorship or authenticity has been called into question. Forensic Document Examiners are called upon to determine authorship in cases of hand printed and handwritten documents such as checks, contracts, bank robbery notes, bomb threats, and threats to public officials. In addition to authorship, the forensic document examiner might be called upon to examine a document for alterations, obliterations, and genuineness of the document. Forensic Document Examiners also exam cases involving typed impressions or other machine generated impressions. It is sometimes possible to determine the make and model of a typewriter or determine the photocopier that a document was copied on. Indented Impressions are created when someone writes on that might be in a stack or pad of paper. Faint impressions from the writing above can be detected with side lighting and/or instrumentation to determine the writing from the sheets of paper above. Indented impressions can provide critical investigative leads in most cases.

A Forensic Document Examiner usually possesses a four year baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university. Training is usually a 2 to 2 1/2 year program at a recognized/accredited forensic laboratory or with a recognized forensic document examiner. During this training period the document trainee reads textbooks on the subject matter, relevant journals and become proficient in the use of laboratory equipment used in document examination. The trainee also spends time one on one with the qualified examiner reviewing actual cases and understanding the fine points and subtle details of document examination. After the successful completion of the training program the trainee is eligible to apply to take the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners (ABFDE) certification examination. This is a three part examination comprised of a written examination, practical problems and oral examination.

Forensic Document Examination is widely used by law enforcement agencies on criminal cases and forensic document examiners are called upon to testify in Federal, State and Municipal Courts of law. Forensic Document Examiners are also used in civil matters such as Wills and Deeds and testify in courts of law regarding these matters.