



INDIANAPOLIS-MARION COUNTY FORENSIC SERVICES AGENCY

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EVIDENCE SUBMISSION GUIDELINE #17

SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

INTRODUCTION: 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. Although a document can be any surface on which there are visible or invisible markings, signs or symbols, 90% of the requested examinations performed by the Forensic Documents Section involve handwriting and/or hand printing on paper (75% involve checks). As such, this bulletin will focus upon the submission of paper documents (e.g. checks, notes, letters, etc.). The submission of other items should be addressed by contacting the I-MCFSA at 327-3670.

EVIDENCE SUBMITTAL PROCEDURES: 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 Card.

EVIDENCE PACKAGING: All efforts should be made to maintain and preserve documentary evidence in the same condition as it was received. The evidence must not be folded, torn, stapled, marked or touched unnecessarily, stamped, subjected to indented writing impressions, etc. Unless legal aspects or good judgment dictate otherwise, all articles submitted as evidence should be carefully marked for identification. These markings should be of a discreet nature so as not to injure the evidence itself. Good judgment may dictate that the evidence itself not be marked. It should be placed in an envelope or container that has been identified on the outside with the date, initials, case number and other pertinent data, **prior to the evidence being placed inside** and sealed (the seal must be initialed). The envelope or container containing documentary evidence **should not be written on with the evidence inside of it**. At no time should documentary evidence be beneath a sheet of paper on which you are writing. The importance of protecting a document from indented writing impressions cannot be over emphasized. Each item of evidence must be placed in a separate, sealed envelope or container. When multiple items are submitted as known of the same subject, they may be submitted in the same container. When unusual circumstances are encountered (e.g. large numbers of documents to be examined), contact the I-MCFSA for advice.

Evidence that is a reproduction copy of an original (e.g. photocopy, fax copy, photograph, etc.) should not be submitted in a plastic container. The printed areas may transfer and adhere to the surface of the container. As a general rule, paper envelopes are preferable for all documentary evidence.

Original evidence is always preferable over reproduction copies. Certain examinations can only be conducted with original documents (e.g. ink examinations, most typewriter examinations, indented writing examinations, etc.). Occasionally the reproduction copy is the questioned document (i.e. did the photocopier produce the questioned document?). The inability to obtain original evidence should never stop the submission of questioned items. The forensic scientist will examine the best evidence available.

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

1. The completion of the I-MCFSA exemplar forms **in their entirety**.
2. Reproduce the original conditions as nearly as possible when obtaining the exemplars (e.g. the text of the writing, size of paper and writing area, type of writing instrument, etc.).
3. Obtain exemplars by dictation until it is believed natural writing has been produced (the number of exemplars needed cannot be predetermined).
4. 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.
5. Remove each exemplar from the sight of the writer as soon as it is completed.
6. Do not give instructions as to spelling, punctuation, or arrangement. It may become necessary to direct the subject to use upper case letters, all hand printing, etc. toward the end of the exemplar.
7. When in doubt as to what writing instrument to use, a black ballpoint pen is the best choice.
8. 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 case and lower case samples should be obtained.
9. In suspected forgery cases, genuine signatures from the "victim" should also be furnished.
10. The writer should initial or sign and date each page.
11. The witness should initial or sign and date each page.
12. If readily available, samples of non-request writings should be obtained (e.g. employment applications, social or business correspondence, cancelled checks, etc.).

LATENT FINGERPRINT EXAMINATIONS: If the evidence is to be chemically treated to develop latent fingerprints, 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 Forensic Identification Unit for examination, 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.

Evidence Submission Guideline #17 adapted from Indiana State Police Laboratory Physical Evidence Bulletins.