

## Forensic Handwriting Analysis - Getting Writing Samples

When crime scene investigator's (CSI's) come across a document that is part of a crime, a forensic handwriting analyst must determine if the writing is consistent with the person who is suspected of writing it or if the writing is a forgery.

To make this determination, the handwriting examiner will require several *standard* handwriting samples, or *standards* as it is called, in order to gain some insight on the person's writing style and ascertain whether or not that person wrote the questionable note. To make matters worse, standard writing samples may have been created with a different writing instrument and under different events surrounding the document. Therefore, making comparisons of a questioned document to a known writing sample on another document may be an impossibility.

If no usable *nonrequested standard* handwriting samples, existing writing samples known to be authentic, are around, the forensic handwriting analyst then asks the suspected author to provide a writing sample while using a pen or pencil and paper similar to the questioned document so that the forensic investigator can establish what is known as a *requested standard* handwriting sample.

Nonrequested standards are advantageous for several reasons. The most important reason is that the nonrequested samples disclose the writer's true writing style and disclose words and phrases that the writer uses on a regular basis. This can be used as strong evidence against the writer. For instance, old documents and letters may contain keyword phrases that are consistent with the ones used in a suicide note. The major disadvantage of nonrequested standard handwriting samples is that they too must be authenticated. If they can not be directly linked to the author, they do not have much value to the criminal investigator.

It is a fact that handwriting styles change throughout our lives. Therefore, examiners try to get writing samples from documents written by a suspected writer that are consistent with the time when a questioned document is apparently written. Let us pretend that an examiner is requested to ascertain whether a 15-year-old, handwritten document such as a will is authentic and was really written by the apparent writer. The forensic handwriting analyst will require examining other documents written by the apparent writer from 15 years ago because those documents will be consistent with his writing style of that time period when the will was prepared.

The biggest advantage of requested handwriting samples is that they are already authentic. The forensic handwriting examiner visually inspects the person write his name. The investigator also can request that the person write out a specific sentence similar to one found in a questioned document so that the examiner can make comparisons between the two sentences verbatim. Sometimes the questioned document contains information that the examiner does not want to disclose to the suspect. In this case, the examiner requests the suspect write out a sentence containing keyword phrases that were used in the questioned document.

Requested handwriting samples are not without their disadvantages too. Some people become nervous and therefore concentrate too hard on providing a writing sample. This can yield uncharacteristic abnormalities in the manner they normally write and sign their names. For this reason, minimal changes are presented that make it difficult to make an accurate comparison.

The suspected author may also knowingly attempt to disguise his writing style so that his handwriting sample does not match the writing on a forged check, will, or some other questioned document. It is unfortunate for the handwriting examiner that the suspect is successful in changing his writing style such that getting a consistent match is difficult.

One way to circumvent this problem is to have the suspect write a great deal of content over several pages. Even though changing your style is easy when writing short phrases, the more you write over several pages, the more your cognizant changes give way to your normal manner of writing. Verbally repeating the same content to the suspected writer several times is another trick that handwriting analysts use to stifle anybody's attempts at disguising his normal handwriting style. With each attempt, the suspect is more likely to use different styles. A keen examiner then discovers the hidden elements of his writing style and the devices that the perpetrator used to hide them within the requested writing before the comparison is made.

Criminal investigators are not worried about a suspect's reluctance to provide a handwriting sample. One might think that providing a handwriting sample will violate the Fifth Amendment which states that a person has the right not to incriminate himself. According to the U.S. Supreme Court in a case, *Gilbert v. the State of California*, handwriting is part of the identifying physical characteristics that are not protected under the Fifth Amendment. Therefore, the court can order a suspect to provide a handwriting standard even if he is reluctant.

## About the Author

Fabiola Castillo markets for the website NinjaCOPS Superstore. This virtual store specializes in crime prevention tools where you can buy cheap stun guns, kubaton keychains, [hidden video spy surveillance cameras](#), nunchaku training videos, [hand Tasers](#), expandable steel batons, and many other

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