

The use of observation techniques and note taking at the crime scene



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Although witness account is important, the law enforcers have to identify other means of obtaining evidence. This is because human memory is weak, and the police cannot use it as their sole source of evidence. Human memory and recall involves people reconstructing the events as they happened at the time of the crime. Some people may deliberately sabotage the investigations by providing false information. It is not easy to rely on people because some are not trustworthy, and they may lie depending on their interest on the case. Some may lie to protect themselves or others related to them, and others may hold some information, especially if they think that revealing the information will lead them to more trouble or more involvement in the case. People have a hard time remembering things as they happened. They may omit crucial information or exaggerate certain information. This leads to distortion of important information; thus, it is important for the police to collect other pieces of evidence to back up their claims.

The problem of relying on memory becomes more complicated if there are many victims or witnesses who were present. This is because they will present different accounts of the events. People have different perspectives, and it is likely that they will have different accounts of the same events (Ruble 2008). Cases such as the Suffolk murders of 1996, the Yorkshire ripper, and the Bill Dando murder involved interviewing many people (Canter, Canter and Youngs 2009). Some of the people had to recall information that happened a long time ago, and this caused problems since the witnesses could only provide partial information. Some of the witnesses or victims may be under pressure during the case. Others may be confused regarding the people or the occurrences they saw, especially with the

passage of time of the case, and this confusion complicates the efforts of forensic scientists. Some people may be too scared, and they may have a hard time recalling information and presenting it with accuracy (Canter, Canter and Youngs 2009). In addition, some witnesses make assumptions and give their own opinions when presenting information as they tend to interpret what they saw instead of reporting the events as they happened.

Many people have studied the unreliable nature of people's memory with the intent of showing that the investigators should be keener in looking for other evidence. They have showed how new information affects people's memory, and how people can change information when they receive false information. In one study, a researcher conducted an experiment showing how people can take false information to be true. In the study, parents told their children false information of how they got lost in a shopping mall. The children later recalled the information, and they added more details regarding the incident (Loftus 1996). Such information is useful especially regarding crime scene investigation. A study showing this will involve participants of different races, ages, socioeconomic background, and gender.

The researcher will introduce the crime to the participants who in this case, will be the witnesses to the crime. The participants will involve a two-minute video clip showing people committing crime. The criminals in the video will be of equal stature, and they will be wearing masks. The researcher will make all efforts possible to ensure that the participants will not know the criminals gender by dressing the criminals in the same attire. After watching the video, the researcher will ask the participants to describe the criminals and try to identify them in a line up. After a week, the same participants will

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watch the same video, but in this case, they will receive some information regarding the crime. For instance, the researchers will tell the participants regarding the ethnic population of the people in the area of the crime scene and the socioeconomic background. The researchers will then show the participants a list of possible suspects related to the crime, and they will tell the participants to identify the suspects in a line up. Differences in results from the two experiments will indicate the unreliable nature of the participants' memory.

Different documentation techniques enable the investigator to record and preserve the information collected from the crime scene. Some of the methods used for documentation include note taking, photography, sketching, and videotaping. From the documents available, the investigator is able to preserve the condition and location of the crime scene.

Documentation will also enable the investigator to identify the existence of any relationship that the physical evidence may present. Documentation is important in case the investigator needs to re-evaluate the scene of the crime or the evidence presented. The investigators training and experience are an important factor in determining his or her skills in note taking (Lee et al. 2001). Note taking involves the writing of all the activities that take place at the scene of the crime. Notes taken from an investigation are important and permanent, and the investigator should not edit them.

Investigators should begin taking notes immediately they receive a call concerning the case, and they should continue taking notes as soon as they receive information regarding the case. They should record all the

information they receive concerning the crime, the crime scene, the people
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involved, and other information of the investigation. The investigator should ensure that he takes legible and well-organized notes. The notes should be in a chronological order. The investigators should ensure that they do not erase anything. In case of errors, they should cross out the errors and add the correct information. They should also ensure that they do not leave any blank spaces in the notebook. The notes reflect the events as they happen, and any additional information can hinder or distort the investigation. Some investigators tend to rely on prepared forms that answer questions relating to the crime scene. However, this can hinder the effectiveness of the investigation because the forms may not capture all the information relating to the crime scene (Lee et al. 2001).

Photographs and videos present the crime scene as it is, and they provide credible pieces of evidence in court. Photographs are credible and present an accurate image of the crime scene. In addition, they are devoid of investigator bias. Investigators should ensure that they do not move anything at the crime scene before there is sufficient photographic and video evidence. Videos are important because they offer technical aspects and other important details of the crime scene. They show the date and time that the investigator took the video. Investigators can use them to show distance and measurement. They have audio capability, which can provide more clues concerning the case and which the police can use as evidence in court. However, the investigators should ensure that they are objective, and they should avoid giving their opinion when recording since this can lead to bias. Proper training ensures that the investigator captures all the necessary information.

Investigators who do not know the right way of capturing video images end up losing the chance to collect credible information. It is necessary for investigators to prepare sketches, and they should do so after they have photographed the crime scene. Investigators and any other person involved in the case should not move anything in the crime scene before the sketches are complete. Sketches are especially important in showing distances and the relationship between the physical evidence and the crime scene. Sketches are specific; they record the relevant details of the crime scene. They also contain information such as the date and time of the crime, the location of the crime, scale, legend, identity of the personnel and their assignment, the dimensions and layout at the crime scene and the positioning of the objects (Girard 2007). The investigators prepare a rough sketch on the scene, which contains all the information relevant to the crime. A professional then prepares a more detailed presentation.

It is important for the investigators to have a thorough understanding of the ways and methods of capturing evidence and the crime scene using photographs, videos, and other observation techniques, and they are able to do this through adequate training. Some assume that they are able to capture all the relevant information just because they know how to use the equipment, and this means that they end up losing a lot of important information. Training enables the investigators to know what to focus on during the investigations. For instance, they are able to record all the information systematically without moving from one piece of the evidence to the other. They are able to know how they can take the images and videos of the crime scene during unfavourable times, for example, during the night or

bad weather. They are able to know how they can manipulate the light features and other technical capabilities on their equipment to ensure that they record clear and quality images. Adequate training enables the investigators to record only the necessary information, and this saves time, energy, and money. Observation techniques back up testimonies from witnesses.

It is important for the investigators to have adequate skills in note taking, as this will help them in recalling information. Investigators should understand the basic principles of note taking, such as taking the notes in a chronological order as the events happen and ensuring that the notes they take are permanent. It is important for the investigators to start recording as soon as they can and to ensure that unauthorized personnel do not come near the crime scene. This will avoid any chance of any person hampering with the evidence and it will enhance the accuracy of the investigations. Arriving at the crime scene as soon as possible will ensure that the investigators get the chance to interview the witnesses who will still have a clear idea of the events that occurred. It will ensure that the witnesses will not have time to analyze the events thus give their own opinions instead of giving the facts.