

# Forensic handwriting analysis



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Forensic Handwriting Analysis Throughout history, scientists, historians, philosophers and artists have been interested in the relationship between handwriting and writer. Handwriting is an individual characteristic which is largely dependent upon unconscious behaviour related to mechanical, physical as well as mental factors. A vast majority of crimes that take place either involve paper or are committed on paper. Scientific analysis has been designed to determine the authenticity of a signature or document as everything about that paper can be a potential clue and therefore, questions about the legitimacy of documents are probably as old as documents themselves.

The field of scientific handwriting analysis determines the authenticity of a signature or document. On the other hand, Graphology is the study of handwriting analysis that assesses the writer's traits and personality stating that any two writers are highly unlikely to share similar handwriting characteristics as style, (macro feature) and opening in characters, (micro features), smoothness, size, slant, curvature and angularity etc.

Questioned Document Examination or QDE which has been a profession since at least 1870, is related to any "questioned" document in any signature, handwriting, typewriting, computer crime detection, historical dating, fraud investigation or other marks whose source or identity is in dispute or doubtful. The most questioned documents are wills, passports, suicide notes, lottery tickets, organized crime, white collar crime, art and sex crime etc. therefore, to check their authenticity certain methods of forensic analysis have been developed.

The method of indented writing or second page writing is the impression captured from the writing instrument on sheets of paper below the one that

contains the original writing and is useful in identifying invaluable investigation procedures when medical records are suspected of containing alterations. Indented writing is recovered either photographically by using oblique (glancing) light or by the use of an apparatus commonly known as ESDA, i. e. Electro-static Detection Apparatus. By employing the ESDA, indented writing may be recovered three, four or even more pages below the original writing.

Since 1993 the status of forensic handwriting analysis has been shaky when The United States Supreme Court handed down a significant decision in *Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals*, where the questioned document had been challenged as not meeting the Daubert factors (four tests of reliability; testing, peer review, error rates and acceptability in the relevant scientific community) required for the admissibility of scientific evidence. The challenges intensified in 1999 after *Kumho Tire v. Carmichael* that expanded the applicability of all forms of expert opinion testimony, which required that the reliability of the evidence be determined in a pre-trial hearing conducted by a judge, "the gatekeeper," in cases where a serious challenge to the reliability of the evidence was presented. Recently, two cases were decided based on expert testimony on handwriting identification as meeting both the Daubert and the Kumho Tire requirements. The cases are *United States v. Prime* in September 2002, and *United States v. Thornton* in January 2003.

In Cases dating back to 1805 when Shakespeare's play was forged, in 1920's in *Oliver Will* case in New York where the document was changed by tearing away a piece, in 1972 in *Mr. Clifford Irving v. Mr. Howard Hughes* case, where a hoax document was used to write an autobiography; to the present day,

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Forensic Handwriting analysts have carried out extensive tests to prove the possible forgery of the document in question and will continue to do so in future by putting to rigorous tests such disputed and doubtful handwritings and signatures to prove their authenticity and bring out the truth.

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