

QD SOP-9 Procedure for Examination of Altered Documents

Approved by Director: Dr. Guy Vallaro

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Purpose: Procedure for Examination of Altered Documents

This procedure provides guidance for examinations involving altered documents that are of Questioned and Known items, exclusively Questioned items, or a single item. These procedures include evaluation of the sufficiency of the material available for examination.

Items submitted for examination may have inherent limitations that can interfere with the methods in this procedure. These limitations should be noted and recorded on worksheet (Quality Record DOC-2). Limitations can be due to submission of non-original documents, limited comparability, or condition of the items submitted for examination (for example, items that are stained, soiled, water-damaged, charred, or shredded).

Responsibility: Forensic Science Examiners assigned to the Unit or conducting casework in the Unit.

Equipment:

1. Lighting (natural, fluorescent) and alternate light sources
Lighting may include the use of transmitted, side or vertical lighting to improve the ability to view fine details.
2. Stereomicroscopes with fiber-optic lighting
3. Video Spectral Comparator
4. Electrostatic Detection Apparatus
5. Measuring devices
3. Scanners
4. Cameras

Procedure:

The Questioned Document Unit will usually be the first Unit to receive document-type evidence for analysis. In the event that another Unit examined this evidence first, it should be understood that there may be analysis methods that may limit the examination of handwriting on these documents. Prior handling, testing, or chemical processing (for example, for latent prints) or swabbing of a document may interfere with the ability of the examiner to see certain characteristics.

1. Beginning of examination: Refer to QD SOP-3 for guidance on transferring, LIMS documentation and evidence identification.
2. All examination steps, relevant observations, and results shall be documented on QR-DOC-2 and/or case notes. If the examiner notes that the submitted evidence is of limited quality or quantity, the examiner or Case Management Unit may need to contact the submitting agency to

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acquire more evidence. If it is noted that the evidence received has been handled or chemically treated that limits or prevents the examination, the submitting agency may be contacted to communicate this information. (see GL20)

3. During the examination procedure, the examiner may use different types of lighting and magnification (such as stereomicroscopes) to examine the documents and any alterations present on the documents. The documents may be scanned or photographed to preserve the alterations or other noted features and for incorporation into the case notes.
4. At various points in these procedures, if the examiner determines that a particular feature is not present or that an item is lacking in quality or comparability may indicate that the examiner should discontinue or limit the procedure(s). It is at the discretion of the examiner to discontinue the procedure at that point and report accordingly or to continue with the applicable procedures to the extent possible. The reasons for such a decision shall be documented on Quality Record DOC-2 and in the case notes.
5. Examine the document for the presence of characteristics indicative of alterations. These can include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - 1) Overwriting,
 - 2) Characteristics of multiple writing instruments,
 - 3) Crowded or awkward placement of writing and/or printed text,
 - 4) Paper fiber disturbance,
 - 5) Use of different fonts, sizes, and/or styles,
 - 6) Area(s) of discoloration,
 - 7) Presence of an obscuring substance,
 - 8) Smearing,
 - 9) Uneven margins,
 - 10) Different printing processes,
 - 11) Irregular spacing and alignment, both vertical and horizontal,
 - 12) Differences in fastening and binding mark,
 - 13) Inconsistent handwriting features,
 - 14) Unusual sequence of line intersections contrary to what may be claimed, and
 - 15) Variations in paper characteristics.

Care must be taken in the evaluation of the following characteristics present on the documents since these characteristics may occur in the normal preparation, handling, and storage of the document.

Non-Destructive Examination Methods

**State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection
Division of Scientific Services**

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1. Non-destructive procedures shall be performed when applicable depending on the evidence presented.
2. Examine the document macroscopically, or microscopically, or both.
3. Examine the document using various lighting techniques, such as side lighting and transmitted lighting.
4. Examine the document using visualizing techniques such as UV, IR, and IRL (VSC4). A control shall be successfully created using the VSC4 and recorded on the day of examination. This control will be placed in the case file.

If the control does not function correctly, the VSC-4 equipment shall be taken out of service pending repair and re-validated before use.

5. Document any alterations with notes and photographs. Measurements of alterations or other significant features will be taken and added to the case notes.
6. The document should be processed with the ESDA. A control shall be run on the day of use with each case and placed in the case file.

After completion of the ESDA method, any further characteristics/features that were developed should be documented with imaging techniques and in the case notes.

7. Analyze, compare, and evaluate the findings.
8. Determine the need for destructive examinations. If further processing is not needed, the examiner may stop at this step and proceed to evaluate the conclusion(s), and generate a report based on their findings and opinions.

Destructive Examination Methods

1. Destructive examination methods should only be commenced once it is determined that no testing by other Units of the Laboratory is needed. If testing is needed by the other Units, the evidence should be processed by those Units first and then returned to the Questioned Document Unit to complete the analysis.
2. Depending on the destructive examination method that might be used, a consumption issue may be present if an arrest has been made in the case. Case management will be asked to follow up with

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the submitting agency to determine if an arrest has been made in the case. If an arrest has been made, Case Management shall be notified to process a "Consumption Notification" and no testing can be completed until a response has been received or the consumption notification grace period has passed. If no arrest has been made, destructive examination methods may proceed.

3. Prior to using these techniques, the item(s) should be appropriately documented on QR-DOC-2. These destructive techniques need not be performed in the order given.
4. Where an obscuring substance is present, use a solvent may be used to make the paper translucent for visualization of any obscured entry(s). Exposure to these chemicals should be limited since over exposure may affect the obscuring substance and substrate. The solvent used will be documented on the worksheet and if possible, an area away from the alteration should be tested with the solvent prior to proceeding with using on the questioned area.
5. Physically remove (for example, abrade, scrape, or peel) the obscuring substance from the document.
6. Chemical ink examinations may be referred to the Chemistry Section.
7. Analyze, compare, and evaluate the findings.
8. If further processing is not needed, the examiner may stop at this step and proceed to evaluate the conclusion(s), and generate a report based on their findings and opinions.

Report:

1. Once the examinations and evaluations have been completed, reports may include one or more of the following types of conclusion(s), opinion(s), and other finding(s):
 - 1) Whether alterations were observed.
 - 2) Whether any of the altered entries were decipherable.
 - 3) The text or description of altered entries.
 - 4) Method or sequence of alterations.
 - 5) Images of alterations and original entries.
 - 6) Other information about the alterations.
2. Images may be inserted into the report to provide clarification or information to the submitting agency.

Sources of Error: Not applicable

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