

# Questioned Documents

**T**he application of allied sciences and analytical techniques to questions concerning documents is termed forensic document examination. The examination of questioned documents consists of the analysis and comparison of questioned handwriting, hand printing, computer generated documents, commercial printing, photocopies, papers, inks, and other documentary evidence with known material in order to establish the authenticity of the contested material as well as the detection of alterations.

*Handwriting includes cursive writing, hand printing, numbers and other marks or signs. Calligraphy and determining personality from handwriting are not part of forensic document examination.*

**NOTE:** The Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory no longer accepts cases and evidence/standards for Questioned Documents. The FBI Crime Laboratory has agreed to work Questioned Documents cases that would normally be sent to the Laboratory.

**For more information on how to submit evidence to the FBI Crime Lab, please call the Questioned Documents Unit at (703)632-8444.**

The FBI performs handwriting comparisons; Fractured/cut edge comparisons (paper, tape, postage stamps, dryer sheets); Indented writing examinations; Printing process examinations (document authentication/typewriting classification); Charred and liquid-soaked document preservation; Alternate light source examinations (ink discrimination, alterations, enhancements); Office machine artifact comparisons; and Database queries (Anonymous Letter File, Automated Counterfeit Identification Database, Bank Robbery Note File).

## I. Care and Marking of Questioned Documents

Questioned documents are subjected to a detailed examination and often yield valuable hidden information. For example, examination of a document may reveal the presence of indentations which can be deciphered photographically or with the Electrostatic Detection Apparatus (ESDA). Therefore, extreme care must be taken in handling, marking, and packaging questioned documents in order to preserve intact all characteristics, such as impressions, for forensic examination. The following procedures should be used in submitting questioned documents:

1. Avoid excess handling.
2. Handle documents with gloves.
3. Do not process chemically before submitting to a forensic document examiner.
4. Do not mark on the questioned documents.
5. Questioned and known documents should not be folded or stapled or clipped together.
6. Do not attempt to repair damaged documents with tape or glue.

Handling of question documents by suspects may also prove a good source of DNA evidence or latent print evidence. Refer to chapters on DNA Evidence and Standards, and Latent Prints for collection of the respective physical evidence.

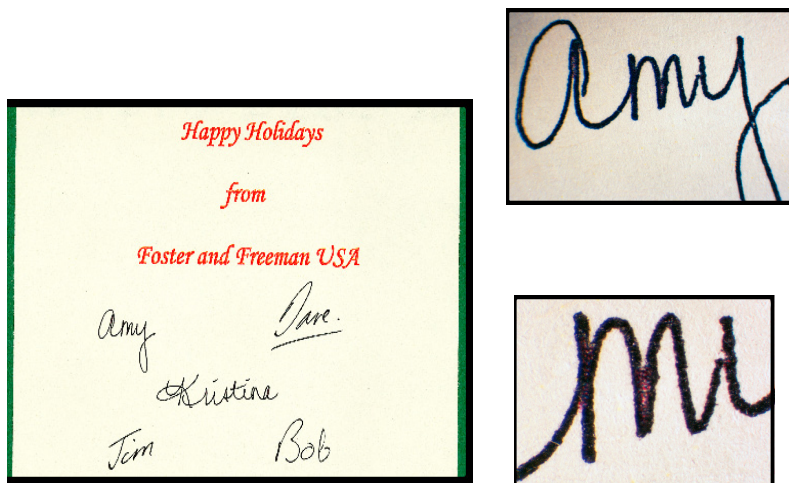
## II. Computer Generated Documents

Computers and various printing technologies generate most of the documents in our everyday business. Examples of this type of evidence include receipts, gift certificates, images of checks, letters, mortgage documents, lease agreements, business memorandum and employment documents.

A forensic document examiner can assist you in identifying the imaging process used to create a questioned document.

Questions that occur regarding computer generated documents include:

- Is the questioned document an original or a copy?
- What is the printing technology and can it be dated?
- Was the document created with more than one printing technology?
- Is there evidence of page substitution in a multi-page document?



**Fig. 9-1** These images show a greeting card and photomicrographs of a signature from the card. “Amy” appears visually to be an original handwritten signature, but it was actually scanned into a computer and printed with a color laser printer. The shiny colored dots are visible under a microscope and indicative of color laser printing.

### III. Other Documents

Common questioned documents are forgeries or threats to include checks, threatening letters, anonymous letters, property registry, drivers licenses, passports, and suicide notes to name a few.

More information on the FBI Laboratory Questioned Documents Unit is found at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/laboratory/scientific-analysis/questioned-documents> at the time of this publication.

# Notes