



# Standard Guide for Scope of Work of Forensic Document Examiners<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Scope

1.1 This guide describes, in general, the duties of forensic document examiners, also referred to as questioned document examiners, examiners of questioned documents, document examiners, or document analysts.

1.2 This document can provide guidance to anyone encountering matters involving forensic document examination.

## 2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards*:<sup>2</sup>

**E2388 Guide for Minimum Training Requirements for Forensic Document Examiners**

## 3. Job Description

3.1 The forensic document examiner makes scientific examinations, comparisons, and analyses of documents in order to: (1) establish genuineness or nongenuineness, or to expose forgery, or to reveal alterations, additions, or deletions, (2) identify or eliminate persons as the source of handwriting, (3) identify or eliminate the source of typewriting or other impression, marks, or relative evidence, and (4) write reports or give testimony, when needed, to aid the users of the examiner's services in understanding the examiner's findings.

## 4. General Duties

4.1 Examiners in this field are sometimes known by the term "handwriting experts." Forensic document examination includes expertise in handwriting identification. Handwriting includes cursive or script style writing, handprinting, signatures, numerals, and other written marks or signs. Forensic document examination does not involve the employment of calligraphic or engrossing skills, nor does it involve a study of handwriting in an attempt to create a personality profile or otherwise analyze or judge the writer's personality or character.

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

4.2 Questions about documents arise in business, finance, civil and criminal trials, or in any matter affected by the integrity of written communications and records.

4.2.1 Typical problems in this field are:

4.2.1.1 The identification of handwriting and typewriting.

4.2.1.2 The identification or elimination of the source of and the output of other mechanical or electronic imaging devices such as printers, copying machines, facsimile equipment, and the like.

4.2.1.3 The identification or elimination of ink, paper, and writing instruments.

4.2.1.4 The establishment of the date, source, history, sequence of preparation, alterations or additions to documents, and relationships of documents.

4.2.2 Other problems are the decipherment and sometimes the restoration, or both, of obscured, deleted, or damaged parts of documents.

4.2.3 The work often includes a study of the information carried by a document for discovery of evidence of spuriousness, identification of persons, or to show significant relationships.

4.2.4 Document examination also includes the recognition and preservation of other relevant physical evidence that may be present on documents.

4.3 Equipment used in forensic document examination includes: microscopes and other optical aids; photographic and other imaging devices, a wide variety of imaging materials adaptable for use with a variety of lighting methods, including those involving radiant energy in the ultraviolet, visible, infrared, and other regions of the electromagnetic spectrum; as well as electrostatic or other devices for the detection, or visualization, or both of indentations and other features present in or on paper or similar substrata. Other analytical instrumentation may be used where appropriate.

4.4 Questions about documents are answered through the application of knowledge, skill, experience, training, (Guide E2388), or education specific to forensic document examination as well as from a number of other fields, such as the physical sciences, mathematics, language studies, and the like. The field of interest includes manufacturing processes and the materials that go into the production of documents, as well as the methods, machines, instruments, and human agencies by which the parts of documents are formed or brought together.

4.5 The results of examinations are reported for use by the judiciary, administrative and executive officers, law enforcement agencies, boards, commissions, lawyers, and individuals. These results are often presented in the form of expert

testimony, explaining the bases and reasons for the conclusions, which may be illustrated by the use of demonstrative evidence.

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