Handwriting Analysis

Background:
A document is made up of several materials. Pigment and paper are put together by means of an instrument such as a pen, pencil, typewriter or electronic printer. When a document is suspected of being fraudulent (i.e. a misrepresentation), it is called a “questioned document.” A document examiner discovers and proves facts regarding documents. Following examination, a report is prepared regarding examination findings. The examiner stands ready to present these findings as an expert witness.

Hand-written Documents

The identification of handwriting is based upon the proposition that “people are all alike; people are all different.” To be able to make a positive identification of a person’s handwriting, a document examiner must be able to see the distinguishing individual writing characteristics that separate one person from all others. If two writings by the same individual are compared, there will be similarities without any major dissimilarity.

To make a valid comparison, the document examiner needs at least two “known” writing samples. An examiner can normally only compare capitals with capitals, “A’s” with “A’s”. Capitals cannot be compared with lower case writing, or “A’s” with “B’s”. The samples should be as close to the same age as the questioned document as possible, as a person’s handwriting form may change over time. There should be at least 2 samples to show the normal range of the individual’s handwriting.

Comparing writing samples, one in question against authentic samples, involves close examination of each letter. Look for significant matches or mis-matches, first in “form” (i.e. general pen movements) of the letter and then in the fine detail of each letter formation.

Use the following as a checklist when making your comparison:
- Significant matches or mis-matches on the form of the letter
- Fine detail of letter formation
- Relative proportions and size of letters
- Parts of compound letters, such as k and g
- Parts of letters may be conventional or unusual in style; flourishes and ornamentations
- Slant, from backhand to forehand slope
- Links or spaces between each letter
- Relative height of each letter above the line
- Quality of the pen itself. Is it: smooth, tremulous, jagged, confident. Does it pause or are there odd pen lifts?

Source: Neo/Sci, 2000
Procedure:

1. Determine if the note found at the scene was written in the victim’s handwriting. Perform an analysis on the photocopies of two known examples of the victim’s handwriting and the “suicide” note found at the scene in the Evidence Folder.

   Use the Handwriting Comparison Table as a guide, cutting out specific letters or words and affixing them to the table to illustrate your analysis on the Handwriting Analysis Sheet.

2. You may choose to “subpoena” written samples from other known acquaintances through your instructor. If so, you must complete another table on a new Handwriting Analysis Sheet to make your comparison.