

ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 183, First Edition
2026

Best Practice Recommendation for Limited Friction Ridge Examinations



Best Practice Recommendation for Limited Friction Ridge Examinations

ASB Approved February 2026

ANSI Approved June 2026



410 North 21st Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80904

This document may be downloaded from: www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board

This document is provided by the AAFS Standards Board (ASB). Users are permitted to print and download the document and extracts from the document for personal use, however the following actions are prohibited under copyright:

- *modifying this document or its related graphics in any way;*
- *using any illustrations or any graphics separately from any accompanying text; and,*
- *failing to include an acknowledgment alongside the copied material noting the AAFS Standards Board as the copyright holder and publisher.*

Users may not reproduce, duplicate, copy, sell, resell, or exploit for any commercial purposes this document or any portion of it. Users may create a hyperlink to www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board to allow persons to download their individual free copy of this document. The hyperlink must not portray AAFS, the AAFS Standards Board, this document, our agents, associates and affiliates in an offensive manner, or be misleading or false. ASB trademarks may not be used as part of a link without written permission from ASB.

The AAFS Standards Board retains the sole right to submit this document to any other forum for any purpose.

Certain commercial entities, equipment or materials may be identified in this document to describe a procedure or concept adequately. Such identification is not intended to imply recommendations or endorsement by the AAFS or the AAFS Standards Board, nor is it intended to imply that the entities, materials, or equipment are necessarily the best available for the purpose.

Proper citation of ASB documents includes the designation, title, edition, and year of publication.

Foreword

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences established the Academy Standards Board (ASB) in 2015 with a vision of safeguarding Justice, Integrity and Fairness through Consensus Based American National Standards. To that end, the ASB develops consensus based forensic standards within a framework accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and provides training to support those standards. ASB values integrity, scientific rigor, openness, due process, collaboration, excellence, diversity and inclusion. ASB is dedicated to developing and making freely accessible the highest quality documentary forensic science consensus Standards, Guidelines, Best Practices, and Technical Reports in a wide range of forensic science disciplines as a service to forensic practitioners and the legal system.

This document was revised, prepared, and finalized as a standard by the Friction Ridge Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Friction Ridge subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for the improvement of this document can be sent to AAFS-ASB Secretariat, asb@aafs.org or 410 N 21st Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904.

All hyperlinks and web addresses shown in this document are current as of the publication date of this standard.

ASB procedures are publicly available, free of cost, at www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board.

Keywords: *limited examinations, friction ridge processing, friction ridge examination*

Table of Contents

1	Scope.....	1
2	Normative References	1
3	Terms and Definitions	1
4	Recommendations.....	2
4.1	Administrative	2
4.2	Evidence Processing.....	2
4.3	Friction Ridge Examinations.....	3
4.4	Documentation and Reporting.....	3

Best Practice Recommendation for Limited Friction Ridge Examinations

1 Scope

This document provides best practice recommendations for policies and procedures regarding limited examinations of latent friction ridge impression evidence, and proper documentation for these examinations. Limited exams are partial analyses, comparisons, and/or processing that do not fully utilize the capabilities of a Forensic Service Provider (FSP).

2 Normative References

There are no normative references.

3 Terms and Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

3.1

examiner (friction ridge)

An individual who has successfully completed their FSP's training program, and is authorized to conduct independent friction ridge examinations for the FSP by observing and interpreting data, making decisions, forming conclusions and opinions, issuing reports, and/or providing testimony.

NOTE Use of the term "examiner" in these documents refers to a "*friction ridge examiner*" and not a "*trainee*."

3.2

Forensic Service Provider

FSP

Organization or individual that conducts and/or supplies forensic services.

ISO 21043-1¹

3.3

friction ridge detail (synonym of friction ridge features)

See 3.4 friction ridge features.

3.4

friction ridge features (synonym of friction ridge detail)

The combination of ridge flow, ridge characteristics, and ridge structure of friction ridge skin, as reproduced and observed in an impression. The observed data used to compare and interpret similarity or dissimilarity between impressions.

3.5

limited examinations

Limited examinations are partial analyses, comparisons, and/or processing that do not fully utilize the capabilities of a Forensic Service Provider (FSP).

¹ ISO. This material is reproduced from ISO 21043-1:2018 with permission of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) on behalf of the International Organization for Standardization. All rights reserved.

3.6 minutia

The point where a friction ridge terminates, or splits into two or more ridges. A subset of the friction ridge detail/features traditionally consisting of ridge endings, bifurcations, and dots, or any combination thereof, used to compare and interpret similarity and dissimilarity between two impressions.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Administrative

4.1.1 Each FSP should decide whether or not they will perform limited examinations. The FSP shall have a written policy regarding whether it performs limited examinations, as well as how to carry out limited examinations should they be performed.

NOTE 1 This document does not state nor imply that performing limited examinations is best practice, nor does it take a position on whether limited examinations should be performed.

NOTE 2 Limited examinations are an operational process. The decision to perform a limited examination is based on operational, non-scientific reasons.

4.1.2 The FSP should assess the risks when deciding to implement a limited examination policy, including published or internal research on potentially missed data.

4.1.3 Examiners and FSPs should apply tools to identify potential biasing information and to minimize the effects of bias.

4.1.4 The FSP should communicate with the requesting stakeholder the existence of a policy allowing for limited examinations and the applicable risks that were assessed in section 4.1.2.

4.2 Evidence Processing

4.2.1 When deciding which evidence to process first, if evidence is identified by the relevant stakeholder as probative, the FSP should take that recommendation into consideration.

4.2.2 The FSP should consider risk factors if choosing to limit the extent to which particular items in a case will be processed. Factors to consider may include offense type, success rate of the item surface, and success rate of the processing technique(s).

4.2.3 When selecting limited processing techniques, the FSP should consider the potential of a given technique for negatively impacting subsequent processing, selecting specific processing techniques with higher sensitivity versus conducting full sequential processing. At a minimum, any friction ridge detail of potential value that has been developed shall be photographed and/or retained and the integrity of the item shall be maintained for potential future examination.

4.2.4 Conducting limited processing of evidence for latent prints should be done in such a way that avoids inhibiting or jeopardizing additional processing techniques from being applied in the future. The FSP shall notify the requesting stakeholder prior to employing limited processing techniques that may negate additional processing techniques in the future.

4.3 Friction Ridge Examinations

4.3.1 If evidence is identified by the stakeholder as probative, the FSP should take that recommendation into consideration if choosing to analyze, search, or compare certain friction ridge impressions first as part of a limited examination. The FSP may take into consideration the investigative needs of the stakeholder if choosing to discontinue analysis, searches, or comparisons.

4.3.2 The FSP should search all ABIS quality friction ridge impressions. ABIS searches may be conducted and reported prior to conducting manual comparisons to named persons.

4.3.3 When an examiner performs an auto-extracted minutiae ABIS search first and no source identifications are made, the examiner should perform a second search by using manually encoded minutiae or 'cleaning up' the auto-extracted minutiae.

4.3.4 FSP policy should address which ABIS databases are searched and how many candidates are requested, if being utilized as part of a limited examination.

4.3.5 The FSP should have a written policy on when manual comparisons can be deferred (e.g., source identifications to multiple individuals, or source identifications to one individual on multiple surfaces or items).

4.3.6 If an FSP has a policy that allows an examiner to cease manual comparisons, the policy should only do so when one of the following conditions are met:

- a) an individual has been identified to multiple items or surfaces;
- b) in cases where suitable friction ridge impressions exist on only one item or surface, an individual has been identified multiple times to that one item or surface.

4.3.7 If manual comparisons are ceased before completed, all suitable friction ridge impressions and evidence shall be maintained so that future examinations can be conducted.

4.4 Documentation and Reporting

4.4.1 The written report should state that additional processing or examinations could be conducted (within the bounds of FSP capabilities at the time) in the future. The extent of the limited examination shall be documented in the case record, including any evidence that was not processed and/or any friction ridge impressions that were of potential value that were not analyzed or compared.

4.4.2 Any request from a stakeholder to discontinue/stop work as part of a limited examination should be fully documented in the case record and report (if applicable). Any pertinent communication with a stakeholder regarding how the examination was limited should be documented in the case record.



Academy Standards Board
410 North 21st Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80904

www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board