

ASB Standard 220, First Edition  
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## Standard for Scene Documentation



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410 North 21<sup>st</sup> Street  
Colorado Springs, CO 80904

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## Foreword

This document delineates general requirements for scene documentation and specific requirements related to notetaking, imaging, and diagramming. The principles and practices described in this document reflect generally accepted professional standards for scene documentation. They are not exhaustive, and specific circumstances may require additional actions or adaptations. This document supports the work of scene investigators, reconstructionists, and other qualified personnel but does not replace the knowledge, skills, judgment, or safety measures developed through appropriate education, training, and experience.

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 Crime Scene Investigation Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Crime Scene Investigation 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](mailto: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](http://www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board).

**Keywords:** *crime scene investigation, documentation, record, notes, note taking, photography, imaging, imagery, diagram, diagramming*

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# Standard for Scene Documentation

## 1 Scope

This document provides the minimum requirements for scene documentation to include notetaking, imaging, and diagramming. This document provides minimum requirements for each type of documentation. This standard is not intended to override applicable laws, regulations, or jurisdictional and forensic service provider (FSP) policies.

## 2 Normative References

The following normative reference is indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies. See Annex A, (informative) Bibliography, for other references.

ANSI/ASB Standard 159, *Standard for Scene Investigation and Reconstruction—Foundational Principles*, 2024, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed.

ASB Standard 226, *Standard for Scene Diagramming*, 2026, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. (*not yet published, contact [asb@aaafs.org](mailto:asb@aaafs.org) to review the draft*)

## 3 Terms and Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

### 3.1

#### **datum**

A reference point at a scene from which measurements are taken.

### 3.2

#### **diagram**

A two-dimensional depiction of a scene including its components, derived from physical measurements or visual data collected manually, electronically, or through a combination of both, that communicates spatial relationships and may exist in rough or final form.

NOTE The use of other terms such as drawing, final diagram, rough diagram, and sketch are used in different ways depending on FSP policy and may be used interchangeably with the term diagram. See **3.4 final diagram** and **3.8 rough diagram**.

### 3.3

#### **documentation**

The information and the medium on which it is contained, including any materials used in the recording of a scene (e.g., forms, diagrams, imagery, notes, reports).

NOTE The medium can be paper, electronic, digital, or a combination thereof.

### 3.4

#### **final diagram**

A completed, verified representation of a scene and its components, prepared in a form suitable for evidentiary, analytical, or official use, and optimized for clarity, accuracy, and independent interpretation.

NOTE Typically, final diagrams are computer generated.

### 3.5

#### **image**

An imitation or representation of a person or thing drawn, painted, or photographed.  
[ASTM E2916-19e1]

### 3.6

#### **note (n)**

A type of documentation (see also **3.3 documentation**).

### 3.7

#### **record (n)**

A type of documentation (see also **3.3 documentation**).

### 3.8

#### **rough diagram**

A diagramming format utilized to convey an initial representation of a scene and its components, created contemporaneous to recording measurements, locations, and relationships necessary to support later refinement and production of a final diagram, if one is completed.

NOTE Typically, rough diagrams are hand-drawn in the field and do not have a finished appearance.

## **4 Scene Documentation**

### **4.1 General**

**4.1.1** Scene documentation is an essential component of scene investigation and reconstruction. It is a continuous process in which the procedures, observations, actions, and aspects of the scene and evidence are contemporaneously recorded from the point of involvement to the presentation of the documentation or content therein at the time of judicial proceedings.

**4.1.2** Documentation can be created in different formats (e.g., handwritten, typed, drawn, photographed, audio or video recorded, electronically diagrammed) and provides a detailed record of observations and tasks completed, aids in report writing, assists with testimony, and allows for independent review by others.

**4.1.3** ANSI/ASB Standard 159, *Standard for Scene Investigation and Reconstruction—Foundational Principles* shall be used in conjunction with this document.

NOTE ANSI/ASB 159 provides foundational principles upon which additional specific requirements, such as those in this document, are based.

**4.1.4** When a specialist serves as the sole person documenting a scene, the applicable elements of this standard shall be implemented. This standard is not intended to override, conflict with, or

otherwise interfere with the established responsibilities, policies, or protocols governing those specialized investigative disciplines.

NOTE Personnel from a variety of disciplines can, at times, perform specialized functions within the broader scope of scene investigation (e.g., medicolegal death investigation, digital forensics). When operating in such specialist capacities, these individuals are subject to distinct duties, requirements, and standards that pertain specifically to their area of expertise. Accordingly, they may have limited responsibilities outlined in this standard.

## **4.2 Minimum Requirements**

**4.2.1** All scenes shall be documented using an established protocol even if it is determined that a scene is unrelated to criminal activity (e.g., a natural death scene).

**4.2.2** All persons tasked with documenting a scene shall be responsible for documentation applicable to their involvement.

**4.2.3** Scene documentation shall be created in a manner that another scene investigator could evaluate the documentation and concur with the methodologies and technologies used. Scene documentation shall also serve the following purposes:

- a) to create a factual, fair, and accurate record of the actions, observations, and conditions at a scene using various methods and technologies; and
- b) to provide the basis from which a report or scene reconstruction could be created from the documentation.

**4.2.4** Documentation of a scene shall contain the following information, when applicable, to the event:

- a) the scene's description and location to include structures, boundaries, barriers, and anything that could impact the physical or mechanical reconstruction of events;
- b) the environmental conditions (e.g., weather, lighting conditions, temperature, odors);
- c) the chain of custody information for all collected evidence; and
- d) a unique case or scene identifier.

## **4.3 Preservation**

**4.3.1** All scene documentation, regardless of recording format or medium, shall be maintained.

NOTE This documentation may include a chain of custody.

**4.3.2** The FSP shall be aware of applicable laws regulating the manner, duration, and storage of such documentation.

**4.3.3** Scene documentation shall be retained according to the FSP retention policy.

## **5 Notetaking**

### **5.1 Minimum Requirements**

**5.1.1** Notes shall be created to document information, observations, and tasks conducted from the point of involvement until all available information has been collected and observations and tasks have been completed.

**5.1.2** Notes shall contain the following information, when applicable, to the event:

- a) names of involved persons (e.g., suspects, victims, witnesses);
- b) description and location of all collected evidence, including measurements;
- c) date(s) on which work was conducted;
- d) identifying information for the individual(s) completing the action;
- e) arrival and departure time(s) on the scene and relevant tasks or assignments as related to the scene;
- f) information that clarifies the completeness of a set of notes (e.g., page number or another manner of identifying the start and end of a set of notes);
- g) testing equipment, calibrated instruments, and reagent tests, including identifying information of the equipment, instrument, or reagent (e.g., lot number, equipment identifier, etc.) used as part of the scene investigation or reconstruction; and
- h) quality control tests performed, the result of the test, and the lot number or identifying number of the reagent.

**NOTE** The above information is the minimum. It is advantageous to record additional details about the scene to ensure thorough notes and assist the scene investigator during judicial proceedings.

**5.1.3** If abbreviations or symbols specific to the FSP are used, the meaning of the abbreviations or symbols shall be defined either in policy or contained within the notes.

### **5.2 Preservation**

**5.2.1** Handwritten notes shall be created using permanent ink, except when conditions exist which may alter or destroy the contents of the notes (e.g., rain causing ink to run or bleed or the use of pencil when labeling entomological evidence).

**5.2.2** Any non-permanent methods shall be made permanent per FSP policy (i.e., making a photocopy to create permanence).

**5.2.2.1** The conditions shall be recorded when non-permanent methods are used due to adverse conditions.

**5.2.3** Alterations to original records shall be made without obliteration, and the change shall be readily available to the reader.

**5.2.3.1** The person's identity (e.g., initials, name, signature) making the change shall be recorded.

**5.2.3.2** If the change is not contemporaneous to the notes being recorded, the date of the change shall also be recorded.

## **6 Imaging**

### **6.1 Minimum Requirements**

**6.1.1** Imaging a scene using technology (e.g., camera, laser scanner, video recorder, etc.) shall be a continuous process in which the observations and aspects of the scene and items contained within are contemporaneously recorded.

**6.1.2** The choice of imaging equipment shall be based on recording images that meet or exceed the requirements for their end uses.

**6.1.3** The choice of image composition, format, resolution, perspective, and quality shall be based on the intended purpose of the image (i.e., documentation or comparison purposes).

**6.1.4** Settings on devices that record the date and time an image is recorded shall be monitored and adjusted for accuracy.

**6.1.5** If the imaging settings and parameters are not captured in Exchangeable Image File Format (EXIF)/metadata, it should be otherwise documented according to FSP policy.

**6.1.6** Specialized equipment (e.g., filters, sensors, alternate light sources, etc.) or imaging techniques (e.g., low light photography, HDR) should be documented.

**6.1.7** The choice of images shall aid the viewer in understanding the identification or dimensions of items, spatial relationships, and orientation to the scene and its contents.

**6.1.8** The sequence and methodology of photography should include overall, mid-range, and close-up images.

### **6.2 Preservation**

**6.2.1** The operator shall not delete original scene images.

**6.2.2** All images, including poor-quality or unintended images, shall remain part of the case file.

**6.2.3** Original scene images shall be stored and maintained to minimize damage, destruction, or loss.

**6.2.4** Actions shall be taken to preserve, copy, and archive images to maximize the security and preservation of the original scene images.

## 7 Diagramming

### 7.1 Minimum Requirements

**7.1.1** Diagrams shall be used, when applicable, to document spatial relationships among scene features, evidence, and other relevant items or conditions.

**7.1.2** ASB Standard 226, *Standard for Scene Diagramming* (*not yet published, contact [asb@aaafs.org](mailto:asb@aaafs.org) to review the draft*), shall be used in conjunction with this document when diagrams are prepared.

**7.1.3** When diagrams are used, the decision to prepare them and the view(s) selected shall be based on the purpose of the documentation, FSP policy, and the needs and scope of the investigation or reconstruction.

**7.1.4** Diagrams shall include sufficient information to support independent interpretation of the documented spatial relationships and, when applicable, reconstruction of key spatial relationships.

**7.1.5** When measurements are used to support a diagram, they shall be recorded in a manner sufficient to document the spatial relationships relevant to the investigation or reconstruction.

**7.1.6** When measurement frameworks are used, applicable reference elements such as baseline endpoints, reference points, instrument positions, or other spatial anchors shall be included.

**7.1.7** Diagrams may be prepared using manual, computer-generated, or hybrid methods.

**7.1.8** If a diagram is drawn to scale, the scale shall be identified on the diagram.

**7.1.9** If a diagram is not drawn to scale, "Not to Scale" shall be clearly indicated on the diagram or in the case record.

**7.1.10** When multiple views are presented, they shall be arranged logically to support interpretation.

**7.1.11** The diagram shall be clear, legible, and organized to support independent review.

**7.1.12** Each diagram shall include, as applicable:

- a) legible text, symbols, dimensions, if recorded, and line work;
- b) a legend or key used to identify and explain symbols, line styles, and abbreviations;
- c) an orientation indicator, such as a north arrow or compass rose, used to indicate diagram orientation;
- d) case identifier or other unique identifier, preparer's name, agency, date, and page number or total pages, as applicable;
- e) location;
- f) datum, if relevant, used for reference; and

- g) when applicable, baseline endpoints, reference points, instrument positions, control or backsight points, or other measurement anchors used, to the extent necessary to support independent interpretation or reconstruction.

## **7.2 Preservation**

**7.2.1** The original measurements, diagrams, and data created as a result of the diagramming process shall be retained according to FSP policy.

**7.2.2** If non-permanent writing utensils are used during data collection, the hand-drawn components should be made permanent via photocopy, photography, or document scanning as soon as practicable per FSP policy.

**7.2.3** Copies shall be made using methods and devices that minimize the potential for alteration, destruction, or loss of the data.

## Annex A (informative)

### Bibliography

The following bibliography is not intended to be an all-inclusive list, review, or endorsement of literature on this topic. The goal of the bibliography is to provide publications cited informationally, and publications relevant to the standard.

- 1] ASTM International, E1188-11:2017, *Collection and Preservation of Information and Physical Items by a Technical Investigator*. In: Book of Standards Volume: 14.02. DOI: 10.1520/E1188-11R17
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- 5] ISO 9001:2015, *Quality Management Systems- Requirements*. International Organization for Standardization
- 6] Organization for Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science. *OSAC Lexicon*<sup>a</sup>.
- 7] Organization for Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science. Standard Guide for Crime Scene Photography. Draft standard. Video/Imaging Technology and Analysis (VITAL) Subcommittee 2022.

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<sup>a</sup> Available from: <https://www.nist.gov/organization-scientific-area-committees-forensic-science/osac-lexicon>

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