



## Questioned Documents Section - 2014

---

### J4 Do People Always Disguise Their Writing the Same? The Trilogy

*Marie E. Durina, BBA\*, San Diego Sheriff's Department, Crime Laboratory, 5255 Mount Etna Drive, San Diego, CA 92117; and Rigo Vargas, BS, Mississippi Crime Laboratory, PO Box 2158, Gulfport, MS 39503*

---

After attending this presentation, attendees will learn the most frequently used strategies for disguising one's writing, if writers tend to use the same form of disguise each time, and if the availability of deliberately disguised known specimen writing aided Forensic Document Examiners (FDE) in their examinations.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing additional research data to support the hypothesis that disguised writing will contain individual characteristics that will be repeated again whenever one attempts to disguise his/her writing. This presentation will also offer data to support the benefit of collecting deliberately disguised known-specimen writing along with natural writing specimens.

Determining whether handwriting is naturally or unnaturally prepared is a common challenge for FDEs and many variables must be taken into consideration during such an examination. Some issues include the writing instrument, writing medium, nature of the signature, age of the subject(s), health of the writer, and the date of the writing. However, the final answer being sought comes down to one of three possibilities: the writing is genuine, the writing was forged (simulated, traced) by another, or the writing was deliberately disguised by the subject (often called auto-forgery or auto simulation).

Literature states that, "To a greater or lesser extent, almost all individuals have the ability to distort their handwriting or signature" so deciding whether writings or signatures were forged by another person or distorted by the subject can be difficult or even impossible.<sup>1</sup> Much research has been done on this topic and many of the methods commonly used to simulate writing are also used to disguise it. "Clearly, the majority of participants displayed some overlapping features between simulation and disguise, however no specific trends in features could be established to characterize each method".<sup>2</sup>

This research study focused on disguised writings and signatures prepared by subjects who intended to deny them at a later date. A deliberately disguised document was obtained from more than 50 subjects along with natural and disguised known-specimen writings. These writings were collected by three forensic document examiners from three different geographic regions of the United States. The specimens were then used in side-by-side examinations and comparisons with their disguised writings. Strategies used by the writers to disguise their writing will be discussed. Potential sources for error in certain problematic samples will also be discussed.

The hypothesis of the FDEs conducting this study was that, like one's natural writing, a person's disguised writing will contain individual characteristics that will be repeated again and again whenever an attempt at disguise is made. Two prior research studies have supported this premise and will also be discussed. One study reported, "In almost all instances wherein a successful disguise was used, the second attempt strongly resembled the first, even though the writings were executed up to six years apart."<sup>3</sup> Another study conducted in 2004 found "an overwhelming majority (89% of the writers) did disguise their signatures the same way each time using the same strategies." It is also hypothesized that the comparison of said characteristics, in a side-by-side examination of questioned to known writings, also like one's natural writing, can lead to the identification of a writer of disguised writing.<sup>4</sup> If this theory is proven correct, it may be necessary to require that the collection of requested known exemplars include a set of "disguised" known samples as well as normal, natural writing specimens.

#### References:

1. Second Edition, Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents, Edited by Jan Seaman Kelly & Brian S. Lindblom
  2. Auto-simulation, A Study of Self-forgery versus Disguise, by Camille Foote
  3. Habit Patterns in Disguised Writing, by Stephen C. McKasson and Joseph J. Lesk
  4. Disguised Signatures, Random or Repetitious, by Marie E. Durina
- 

#### Handwriting, Disguise, Auto Simulation