## J27 The Reliability of Hand Printing Identification by the Forensic Document Examiner

*Linda L. Mitchell, BS*, 243 S Escondido Boulevard, #304, Escondido, CA 92025-4116; and Mara L. Merlino, PhD*, 1066 Tamworth Lane, Frankfort, KY 40601*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the preliminary results of the most recent study involving the ability of the Forensic Document Examiner (FDE) to properly identify the authors of block printing. They will also have reviewed the most current *Daubert* rulings on this aspect of handwriting analysis.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by explaining how the results of this study will directly affect future *Daubert* challenges by providing blind study data that could potentially support the premise that current protocols for forensic handwriting analysis also apply to hand printing, specifically block printing.

On October 8, 2013, the 7th United States Federal Court for the Western District of Wisconsin conducted a *Daubert* hearing to determine whether testimony by an FDE regarding the identification of hand printing "rests on a reliable foundation."[1] The court ruled that the theories of handwriting analysis have not been adequately tested and found reliable when applied to hand printing. In this instance, Bolsover's testimony was excluded.

Alternatively, in May of 2014, there was a similar request for a *Daubert* hearing in the 15th Judicial Circuit Court in Palm Beach, FL, regarding the reliability of testimony of the identification of hand printing.[2] The court ruled that *Daubert* requisites had been met by FDEs William Flynn and Grant Sperry. Testimony of this kind was supported by the 2002 Kam/Lin study wherein it was indicated that FDEs perform better than laypersons in the identification of both cursive and hand printing.[3]

It has been widely noted in the media and within the forensic community that hand printing, specifically block letters, has become more commonly used in everyday writing. It is very frequently seen in forms, addresses, and work-related communications as well. Because of these factors, it has become increasingly important to verify for the purposes of *Daubert* that forensic examination of hand printed documents by qualified FDEs is reliable. This study was undertaken in partial response to the previously cited lack of supporting research in the area of hand printing. It is the purpose of this research to determine the FDE's reliability in identifying block letter hand printing (ALL CAPITALS) using the same methods and protocols as cursive. The virtual absence of lower-case letters in this study is expected to reduce the amount of potential variation and individualizing characteristics present for identification purposes. It likewise mirrors block printing common to FDE casework.

The materials within the study packets were intended to reflect evidence and procedures similar to normal bench work in a condensed form. Twenty-five questioned writings were offered in individual "case packets." Each was associated with sample writing of three potential "suspects." Participants were asked to opine (on a nine-point scale) whether or not each suspect was the writer.

The "testing" portion of this study was concluded in October 2014 and the compiled data was analyzed under the auspices of Dr. Mara Merlino. The preliminary results will be presented along with potential interpretations of the analyzed data sets.

**References:**

1. United States District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin. United States of America v. Gerald Johnsted, Opinion and Order 12-cr-146-wmc.
2. Circuit Court of the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit in and for Palm Beach County, Florida, Criminal Division "S". State of Florida vs. Jesse Lee Miller. Case Number 2007CF010420AXX
3. Kam, Moshe, Ph.D. and Lin, Erwei, M.S. (December 28, 2002). Writer Identification using Hand-Printed and Non Hand-Printed Questioned Documents

**Hand Printing, Daubert Challenge, Handwriting Identification**