



Questioned Documents Section - 2015

J5 Different Writer or Alternate Writing Style — A Case Review

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The goal of this presentation is to review fundamental concepts related to features/characteristics observed in handwriting which form the basis for identification or elimination of an individual as the writer of questioned or disputed handwriting.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by attempting to offer clarity to fundamental concepts used in evaluating and comparing handwriting features/characteristics resulting in a more accurate determination of authorship or non-authorship of disputed/questioned handwriting.

The validity of handwriting identification as a forensic science has been under intense attack by academics and legal critics for the past 30 years. In response, the forensic document examination community embarked on unprecedented research which focused on establishing that handwriting can be individualized and that properly trained individuals can associate handwriting that meets certain criteria to a specific individual with significantly greater accuracy than an untrained person.

One of the axioms of forensic document examinations is that two properly trained Forensic Document Examiners (FDEs) examining and comparing the same evidence should reach the same conclusion; however, in practice, it is not uncommon for two FDEs to examine the same evidence and render opinions that are diametrically opposed to each other. In some cases, the conflicting opinions may be caused by somewhat ambiguous evidence, which may be characterized as limited writing, highly stylized writing (e.g., signatures), or disguised questioned and/or specimen writing. However, if the questioned writing consists of multiple entries with many repetitions of the same words, letters, and/or letter combinations and the observed features/characters are consistent throughout the documents, the ambiguousness is less of a factor. Thus, two qualified FDEs with adequate specimens should arrive at the same conclusion regarding authorship. A case is being presented where this did not occur. The conclusions reached by the two examiners were essentially in direct opposition to each other. It goes without saying that one of the examiners made an error. This study presents one examiner's court presentations, the court's summary of evidence presented, and the court's findings (verdict).

Similarity, Variation, Fundamental Difference