



J9 Testing the Perceptual Accuracy of a Subject's Ability to Identify Their Own Handwritten Numbers and Words

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand that some people cannot recognize their own handwriting and handwritten numbers. This presentation will illustrate an original research method that acquires data for use in overcoming a general assumption that people can successfully recognize their own handwriting.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by offering insights about a person's subjective statement of "That's not my handwriting" or "It looks like my handwriting, but I don't remember writing it" by applying forensic handwriting identification methodology to show evidence that it is their handwriting. This presentation will illuminate the issue of eyewitness error in which a subject is unable to identify their handwritten words or numbers in records and other documents.

This presentation will illuminate the issue of eyewitness error when a subject denies, is unable to, or mistakenly identifies his/her handwritten words and/or numbers in cases involving: (1) altered medical records; (2) employment logs/timesheets; (3) legal documents; and (4) other questionable handwritten entries. Knowing these insights may become the basis of serving the truth when a subject cannot recall or is unable to accurately recognize and successfully identify the questioned handwritten numbers and/or words.

Warned of the unreliability of eyewitness testimony, someone may be confounded when comparing the statement of his suspect, "That's not my handwriting" with the proffered expert opinion of "The suspect wrote it," or vice-versa. Outside the specialty of Forensic Document Examination (FDE), some people believe that they can successfully identify their own handwriting.

Prompted by credibility challenges of expert handwriting opinion, a small population study with 23 subjects was designed and conducted for the purpose of securing data on the success of subjects and their ability to recognize their handwriting and handwritten numerals.

Handwritten numbers are written similarly in various languages; therefore, they cross borders, allowing subjects of many nationalities to participate in the study. Additionally, the following confidence choices were included: "I'm 100% certain," "I'm fairly certain," "I'm guessing/I don't know," and "My writing is not observed on this exhibit."

In summary, the results of this study revealed that 98% of the subjects successfully identified their handwriting, while 50% of the subjects failed to successfully identify their handwritten numbers. The handwritten numbers used for this study included: "April 15, 2007," "1948," "78910."

In conclusion, because the Forensic Document Examiner's expert opinion is tested for reliability based on the sufficiency of evidence coupled with the examiner's skill, knowledge, and experience, the awareness of the results of this study may become an important factor for use as the basis for forming a reliable opinion.

There is much to be gleaned from this study. For example, statistics regarding the subjects' confidence choices may be tabulated for an expanded version of this study. Additionally, it would be insightful to acquire the subjects' confidence choices before the study's purpose was revealed, and prior to the handwriting of the phrases and numbers. Furthermore, subjects' bias or intentional disguise could factor into the overall dilemma of conflicting opinions on the same evidence.

The preliminary data from this small population study suggests additional research would be fruitful.

Eyewitness Error, Opinion Conflict, Handwriting Perception