



J18 Inconspicuous Writing Features: An Illustrated Glossary

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will have expanded their knowledge of inconspicuous writing features for use in forming and explaining a fact-based opinion.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by lessening the chances of wrongful convictions by the effective use of inconspicuous features in forming and explaining a reliable opinion of writer identity in order to serve truth and justice for all.

Inconspicuous features play a pivotal role in forming an opinion because, subtle as they may be, to the trained eye the features are observable, measurable and, in some cases, habitual. As such, they link the writer to the written. By viewing the illustrations, attendees may expand their knowledge of inconspicuous writing features and may gain a better understanding of what to look for during the examination process that is significant for use in forming an opinion.

The glossary's select group of 12 inconspicuous features are: malformed letters due to impaired muscle tension and release; precise covering strokes on upper, lower and mid-zone letters; breaks in the progressive motor sequence; circle letter movement direction (clockwise/counter-clockwise); and movement direction of the entry and exit strokes on and off the paper.

Each illustration will be accompanied by a brief description. The descriptions become a critical tool for use in presenting and explaining the basis of the examiner's opinion. The illustrations, coupled with the descriptions, reveal the writer's unique movements as they pertain to writer identification (linking the writer to the written) of the evidence.

Attendees will learn the definition of an inconspicuous feature that includes three properties (observable, measurable, and habitual) and three additional factors (hidden from the writer's attention through his/her being unaware of writing it in that particular way, difficult movement for the writer to intentionally suppress or change, and difficult for an imitator to notice, let alone incorporate, while attempting to write a successful imitation).

As a result of learning the objectives of this presentation, the forensic examiner may: (1) gain wisdom: the developed ability to perceive inconspicuous features allows the examiner to build and defend a reliable opinion of authorship; (2) communicate clearly: the use of the descriptions allows the examiner, whether to a lay audience or to one's peers, to clearly explain the properties of the features used to form the opinion; (3) rebut effectively: the confidence to stand up to the challenges of cross-examination is significantly boosted when one can explain the opinion beyond simply relying on form-matching and/or common qualities alone; and (4) check reliability: to lessen the chances of being mistaken that may lead to a wrongful conviction, the effective use of inconspicuous features in forming and explaining a reliable opinion of writer identity serves truth and justice.

Fact-Based Opinion, Writer Identification, Inconspicuous Features