



Scientific Association of Forensic Examiners Standards

Guide for Taking Request Writing

1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers the process and procedure for taking request writing. Request writing exemplars are obtained for the purpose of collecting a volume of writing sufficient in quantity and quality to compare with questioned writing.

2. Significance and Use

2.1 It is always preferable for comparison purposes to acquire handwriting or signatures that were prepared in the normal course of business or daily routine. Additionally, existing exemplars should be contemporaneous with the questioned writing. The examiner is sometimes faced with a lack of sufficient or appropriate comparison exemplars or both; thus, the need for request writing.

3. Inferior Exemplars

3.1 Examples of inferior exemplars are:

3.1.1 Too-light or too-dark photocopies, microfiche images, faded writing/initials/signatures, original size unknown, and so forth;

3.1.2 Writings not contemporaneous with the questioned document;

3.1.3 Lack of similar words or letter combinations;

3.1.4 Different writing styles (for example, printed versus cursive);

3.1.5 Questioned document was written under unusual circumstances (for example, lying in bed, standing in line, in a moving vehicle, and so forth).

3.1.5.1 In such cases the exemplars should be written under the same conditions.

3.1.6 The subject's conditions (health, medications, physical, mental or emotional trauma, and so forth) have changed significantly since the date of the questioned writing.

4. Request Writing Forms

4.1 *Request Writing Worksheet*—This worksheet is used to collect the subject's personal history (for example, age, level of education, birthplace, corrective lenses, and so forth).

4.2 *Handwriting Specimen Form*—This form should include all letters of the alphabet in upper and lowercase numerals (0-9); first, middle, and last names beginning with "A," "B," and "C" (for example, Albert Bradford Carter) through the alphabet; and street addresses with up to five numbers simulating the same combinations of capital letters (for example, Atlantic Blvd.).

4.3 *Standard Dictation Material*—Material such as the "London Letter," which contains all letters of the alphabet, is useful.

4.4 *Dictation Material*—includes specific words and letter combinations that appear in the questioned document. Names, words, letters, letter combinations, and numerals that appear on the questioned document must be obtained for accuracy of comparison. Include words containing the same beginnings and endings. If an idiosyncratic letter appears in the middle of a word, include words with the same letter in the middle.

4.5 *Blank Forms*—the blank form should be in a format that duplicates the questioned document.

5. Writing Conditions

5.1 Seat the subject comfortably at a table.

5.2 Attempt to duplicate the writing materials and the writing circumstances of the questioned document. The subject must write on paper the same size as the document in question. If the questioned handwriting appears on a check, the sample should be written on the

exact size of the questioned check, etc. The request exemplars should also replicate the lines, spacing, margins, etc. as on the document in question.

5.3 Note any changes in the subject's physical, mental, or emotional condition since the date of the questioned document (for example, "his arm was in a cast," "he stated that he had just had surgery and is on pain medication," and so forth).

5.4 Ascertain the subject's physical/mental/emotional condition at the time of the questioned writing.

6. Procedure

6.1 Whenever possible, the examiner should personally supervise and observe the entire request writing process. Where possible, an assistant should be present as a witness to collect specimens.

6.2 In the event that the subject refuses to provide request writing to the document examiner, s/he should be requested to put in writing the reason for such refusal, then sign and date the statement.

6.3 The questioned document should not be shown to the subject.

6.4 Before the subject fills out the request writing worksheet and handwriting specimen form, explain the request writing procedure.

6.5 Do not comment on such issues as spelling or grammar or how to arrange the writing on the document.

6.6 Instruct the subject to use cursive writing if the questioned material is in cursive, hand-print if the questioned material is printed, etc.

6.7 Instruct the subject to write first with his or her accustomed writing hand and then follow with the opposite writing hand.

6.8 Make written notes regarding the subject's posture, gestures, demeanor, attitude, and so forth.

6.9 When dictating, gradually increase the speed, which will induce the subject to write faster to keep up, in which case he will have no time to think about the formal rendering of the handwriting. (Note changes made to dictation speed.)

6.10 Observe the pen pressure and speed, nervousness, and how often the subject hesitates while writing. Note any perceived attempt to disguise the writing.

6.11 If there are indications of attempts to disguise the writing, the examiner should arrange for an additional session, if possible. The subject will likely forget any method of disguise used.

6.12 The subject should write the time and date and sign each page in the lower right-hand corner for identification. The document examiner should initial and number each page.

6.13 Remove each initialed page from the subject's view before proceeding to the next one.

7. Keywords

7.1 disguised writing; handwriting specimen form; questioned documents; request writing; request writing worksheet; writing exemplar