

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### REQUIREMENTS FOR HANDWRITING AND SIGNATURE EXAMINATIONS

THE FOLLOWING ADVICE IS PROVIDED TO INFORM ON THE REQUIREMENTS THAT WILL ALLOW FOR THE FORENSIC EXAMINATION OF HANDWRITING AND SIGNATURES (COLLECTIVELY REFERRED TO AS WRITINGS).

THE INFORMATION IS A GENERAL OVERVIEW ONLY.

THE EXAMINERS AT DOCUMENT EXAMINATION SOLUTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO EXPAND ON ANY ASPECT OF THIS INFORMATION SHOULD IT BE REQUIRED.

### OVERVIEW OF EXAMINATION

In simple terms, a forensic handwriting or signature examination requires a **comparison** between questioned and specimen writings.

On occasions, the judicial process will require the question of writing authorship to be answered. Ultimately, the decision of authorship remains with the trier of the fact, however persons with expertise in writing examination and comparison can, as an expert witness, provide an opinion following a detailed forensic examination.

Where a forensic examination of writings is to occur, it is imperative that appropriate material is provided to support the comparison.

The following information outlines the requirements for sourcing and providing appropriate examination material.

### ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS – HIGHLY DESIRABLE FOR EXAMINATION

There are two reasons why the document bearing the original questioned writings should be submitted for examination. These are:

- i. The document bearing the questioned writing is examined as well as the actual writing. Evidence of the authenticity of the writing may be supported by other physical evidence observed on the document.
- ii. The ink line quality associated with the original writing provides critical evidence. This will not be present in non-original documents.

The examination of non-original writings can and does occur, however there are limitations in the process that can influence the strength of any opinions provided. In the event it is not possible to provide the original documents, a colour scan of the original at the highest possible resolution (recommend 600dpi) is the next preferred option. A scan of the original document will provide a far superior reproduction than a photocopy.

### SPECIMEN WRITINGS

The purpose of specimen writings is to provide meaningful examples of a writer's abilities and establish variations exist. The purpose of the specimen material is to provide the examiner with an accurate and unbiased representation of the ability of the writer.

As writing can be influenced by factors such as injury, illness, age or drugs, or can be disguised or simulated, it is imperative that the correct specimen material is available.

Specimen writings can be categorised in the following four ways;

1. **Purported writings** – where by virtue of the location and nature of the writings, it can be attributed to a particular person;
2. **Acknowledged writings** – where a person acknowledges that they have completed writings that already exist;
3. **Known writings** – where an independent person confirms that they have witnessed the writings being completed;
4. **Requested writings** – where the specimen material is obtained specifically for the purpose of comparison.

*Where possible, specimen material should be obtained from different categories. For example, requested specimen material should not be provided in isolation, it should ideally be provided with purported, acknowledged or known specimen material of the same writer.*

### SOURCING SPECIMEN WRITING

The following advice is general. Prior to obtaining specimen material, consider the following;

- The advice of the Examiner should be followed when identifying the amount of specimen material required.
- With handwriting, if the questioned writing is upper case print, then the specimen material **must** also be upper case print. The same applies with other styles of writing.
- Do not select specimen material based on your own interpretation of the writings.
  - *Note: This is critical, specimen material is intended to represent the handwriting / signature behaviour of the writer. If a decision is made to withhold certain material from the Examiner, this will compromise the examination.*
- The specimen material should, where possible, be obtained over a date range that spans that of the questioned writing / signing.
- With signatures, you should seek to initially provide between 12 – 20 examples.
  - *Note: The nature of comparison will mean that in certain circumstances a smaller amount of specimen material is required, whilst in others an extensive and particular amount of material will need to be sourced. The Examiner will provide you with advice on this.*
- Potential sources of purported, acknowledged and known specimen writing include:
  - Bank and financial documents
  - Business correspondence
  - Notebooks, diaries and study notes
  - Legal documents, including wills
  - Letters, greeting cards and other personal correspondence

### SUMMARY

Providing original questioned and specimen documents is important and can influence the outcome of a forensic writing examination.

Please contact John McGinn or Tonya Trubshoe on +61 (0)8 9313 4559 should you require further clarification or guidance.