

# Crime Scene Basics

## Vocabulary

**CRIME SCENE:** Any physical location in which a crime has occurred or is suspected of having occurred.

**PRIMARY CRIME SCENE** – The original location of a crime or accident.

**SECONDARY CRIME SCENE** – An alternate location where additional evidence may be found.

**SUSPECT** - Person thought to be capable of committing a crime.

**ACCOMPLICE** - Person associated with someone suspected of committing a crime.

**ALIBI** - Statement of where a suspect was at the time of a crime.

## Types of Evidence

**TESTIMONIAL EVIDENCE** includes oral or written statements and testimony by eyewitnesses.

**PHYSICAL EVIDENCE** refers to any material items that would be present at the crime scene, on the victims, or found in a suspect's possession.

**TRACE EVIDENCE** refers to evidence that is found at a crime scene in small but measurable amounts.

## How can evidence be used?

- ▶ May **prove** that a crime has been committed
- ▶ Establish **key elements** of a crime
- ▶ Link a **suspect** with a crime scene or a victim
- ▶ Establish the **identity** of a victim or suspect
- ▶ Corroborate verbal **witness** testimony
- ▶ Exonerate the **innocent**.
- ▶ Give **detectives** leads to work with in the case

## Crime Scene Protocol

- ▶ **INTERVIEW** the first officer on the scene, witnesses, and victims to determine what happened.
- ▶ **EXAMINE** the crime scene to identify potential evidence, the point of entry and point of exit, and getting the general layout of the crime scene.
- ▶ **DOCUMENT** the crime scene by taking photographs and making sketches of the crime scene area and the location of the evidence.
- ▶ **PROCESS** the crime scene by collecting evidence.

## What types of evidence could be found at a crime scene?

Brainstorm with your group to come up with a list of evidence you might find at a crime scene.

## Crime Scene Personnel

**POLICE OFFICERS** are typically the first to arrive at a crime scene. They are responsible for securing the scene and detaining persons of interest in the crime.

The **CSI UNIT** documents the crime scene in detail and collects any physical evidence.

The **DISTRICT ATTORNEY** is often present to help determine if any search warrants are required to proceed and obtains those warrants from a judge.

The **MEDICAL EXAMINER** may or may not be present to determine a preliminary cause of death.

**SPECIALISTS** (entomologists, forensic scientists, etc.) may be called in if an expert is needed.

**DETECTIVES** interview witnesses and consult with the CSI unit. They investigate the crime by following leads provided by witnesses and physical evidence.

# Eyewitness Basics

## What is testimonial evidence?

Testimonial evidence includes oral or written statements given to police as well as testimony in court by people who witnessed an event.

Eyewitness accounts can be a useful tool in helping investigators with analyzing crime scenes, but are not viewed to be highly reliable. In addition, eyewitness identifications (right or wrong) can have a big influence on the outcome of an investigation or trial.

## Witness Factors

Age may play a role in the accuracy of an eyewitness' statement or identification of a suspect.

The Cross Race Effect (CRE) is a phenomenon in which people are better at recognizing faces of their own race rather than those of other races.

The use of drugs can alter a person's ability to recall the events of a crime even after they are no longer under the influence.

A person's memory of an event can be influenced by other witnesses, investigators, and/or the media. Investigators use open-ended questioning and follow procedures for conducting line-ups to limit their influence on a witness' memory of an event or identification of a suspect.

## Crime Scene & Suspect Factors

A crime that is extremely traumatic may affect a witness' recall of the event. For example, a witness confronted with a weapon tends to focus on the weapon rather than the perpetrator's face.

Someone who is able to focus on a perpetrator's face for a minute or longer will tend to have a more accurate memory than someone who saw the person for only a few seconds.

Faces that are either highly attractive/unattractive or distinctive are more likely to be accurately recognized. Simple disguises can interfere with accurate eyewitness identification, but piercings and tattoos increases the likelihood of an accurate identification.

The time of day in which the crime occurred and a person's view of the scene may affect what a he/she is able to see and remember.

**Did you know?** Eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions nationwide, playing a role in more than 75% of convictions overturned through DNA testing. (The Innocence Project, 2008)

## Memory Challenge

How many items do you remember? List them below.

## Crime Scene Challenge

Write the answers for each question in the space below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_



## Facial Composites

Investigators work with sketch artists and eyewitnesses to create **facial composites**, or sketches of a person's face. Today many police departments are using facial reconstruction software to help them with this task.

The composite may be used **internally** to assist officers in identifying the suspect or used **externally** through local media (radio, TV, and newspaper) to solicit leads from citizens.



**FACES** is a software program that offers many options to recreate a person's facial features.