

# HOW TO SELECT A QUALIFIED DOCUMENT EXAMINER

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## I. QUALIFIED AND COMPETENT QD EXPERTS:

This category includes experts whose expertise and ability depends on the length and quality of their training and experience. Even though your documents might only appear to involve handwriting identification, it is important to select an expert with training and experience in all phases of questioned document examination. The concerned attorney should carefully review the "expert's" qualifications and, if in doubt, check their background thoroughly. Following is a list of criteria designed to assist you in your selection of a competent expert who is qualified to assist you with your questioned document problem:

- A. Request a copy of your prospective expert's Curriculum Vita and review it carefully to determine his or her quality of training and experience.
- B. Competent examiners should have received a minimum of **Two Years FULL TIME apprenticeship training** under a qualified document examiner. One cannot learn this field by simply doing the work.
- C. It is beneficial to select an expert who has worked as a document examiner for a governmental laboratory. Not only are they exposed to a high volume of casework, they also are able to attend specialized training courses given by the FBI, Secret Service, etc.
- D. A qualified expert should be a **Member** and regular attendee of the meetings of one or more of the following organizations:
  - 1. American Academy of Forensic Sciences (Questioned Document Section) (AAFS)
  - 2. Southwest Association of Forensic Document Examiners (SWAFDE)
  - 3. American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE)

NOTE: These are the only organizations recognized by competent members of this profession

- E. Your Document Examiner should have a fully equipped laboratory with capabilities for infrared and ultraviolet ink examination, restoration of indented writing, stereoscopic microscopic examination, a full reference library, plus tools and equipment for examination of typewriters, photocopiers, and paper.
- F. Certification by "The American Board of Forensic Document Examiners" (*NOTE: This is the only certifying board recognized by the profession of document examiner in the United States and Canada.* Certified diplomates will usually designate this by "D-ABFDE") - - Note: This is **NOT** to be confused with the American Board of Forensic Examiners ("ABFE") which is NOT recognized as a certifying body by the profession of questioned document examination.
- G. Will your expert make a good impression in court? Good appearance and effective communication skills are a critical factor. A poor witness can enhance the opponent's case!

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## II. UNQUALIFIED QD EXPERTS (PSEUDO-EXPERTS):

### A. GRAPHOLOGISTS:

Many people trained in graphoanalysis have turned to the more lucrative profession of document examination without bothering to obtain the proper training. Since they are not qualified to join the recognized professional organizations and do not possess the necessary qualifications for certification by the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners, they have created organizations and certification programs of their own with similar sounding names (such as the "ABFE"). They even deny their previous affiliation with graphoanalysis for fear of exposure as an unqualified document examiner.

NOTE: Graphologists may have attended meetings of AAFS. They are not allowed to attend meetings hosted by SWAFDE or ASQDE. D-ABFDE certification may be verified by calling offices of the American Board in Houston, Texas. Many in this category of "Expert" claim certification by the "ABFE" which, again, is NOT the recognized certifying body. Again, look for references with respect to training.

### B. CRIMINALISTS:

Many qualified document examiners have a background in criminalistics. However, some fully qualified Criminalists profess a knowledge of questioned document examination without the prerequisite 2-year apprenticeship training and experience in their field.

### C. INCOMPETENT:

This category might include well-meaning and otherwise honest people who have not received proper training to do the work. Good examples would be the former police detective who worked in a Forgery Unit for a number of years and decides he or she has seen enough handwriting to be able to do the job; the former police officer who has attended a few seminars designed to acquaint investigators with document examination; or someone who has been unable to become properly trained and decides to do the work anyway. These individuals would be equivalent to someone deciding that brain surgery would be a wonderful career without bothering to go to medical school! Ask these people to document their training - see if it measures up to prescribed professional standards for this forensic science as described above.

### SCREEN YOUR EXPERT

**THE EXAMINATION OF QUESTIONED DOCUMENTS  
IS A VERY SUBJECTIVE SCIENCE**

**THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR  
PROPER TRAINING  
EXPERIENCE  
KNOWLEDGE**