Notes: Documenting the Crime Scene
Notes:

• When the lead investigator arrives, the note-taker (often the investigator) should record:
  • Date and time of arrival.
  • Who is present.
  • Identities of any other personnel contacted.

• Investigators must keep accurate records of
  • Personnel movements.
  • First responding officer.
  • Tasks assigned to each person.
Format for notes:

- In ink (blue or black), and
- Written in a bound notebook,
- Written at the time of the initial investigation, not left to memory for later.
• Once the initial search for evidence has taken place, team members mark the location of all evidence.
• Before any evidence is physically collected, the investigator must completely describe it in their notes:
  – Who found it,
  – Its location,
  – How, who and when it was packaged.
• Any bodies present must be described before the medical examiner or coroner moves in.
  – appearance,
  – position,
  – wounds,
  – blood spatter)
• Notes need to be sufficiently detailed to refresh examiners memory months, or years down the road.
Crime Scene Notes Should be:

• Concise
• Legible
• Accurate
• **Objective (contain no theories, opinions, or speculation).**
• Are subject to legal discovery.
• Are legally required in some jurisdictions and must be maintained and surrendered.
Photography:

• Sequence of photography should be the same for all crime scenes.
• Show the overall scene first. Then work down to individual pieces of evidence.
  – Pristine,
  – Overall,
  – Intermediate,
  – Close-up.
Pristine Photos:

• The first photos taken are “Pristine”
  – Unaltered photos without markers, scales, etc.
Overall Photos:

• Used to demonstrate:
  – How all of the evidence relates to each other.
  – Documents the scope of the scene, including entry and exit.
Intermediate Photos:

- Done as sections of the overall photos.
- Documents the interrelationship of multiple items of evidence.
- Shows the layout of smaller significant areas.
- Should be taken with evidence markers in place.
- Should include the center of the scene.
Close-up Photos:

• Taken last.
• Show the detail of individual objects or evidence.
  – Taken at a 90 degree angle to the object, then other angles may be taken.
  – With and w/o evidence markers and scales.
  – Necessary to apply individualization to items.

• MUST include:
  • A scale.
  • Case Number
  • Item number
  • Date
  • Initials
Additional Photos to take:

• People:
  – Victims – wounds, position, trace evidence.
  – Suspects – wounds, marks, bruising or other trace evidence.
  – Witnesses – to identify later.
  – Crowds & Bystanders – may contain suspects.

• Special Additional Perspectives:
  – Areal of entire scene
  – Witness positions

• The goal is to produce examination worthy photographs.
Each photograph logged should tell:

• Date and time taken.
• Location of picture.
• Lighting used AND its angle.
• Angle of the camera
• Description of the subject in the picture.
• Ruler or measuring scale may also be placed in the photo.
Sketching the crime scene

– Done after the notes and photos.
– Especially important for showing the location of collected evidence.
Rough Sketch:

- There isn’t be time for making a polished sketch at the scene, so a rough sketch simply shows an accurate depiction of the dimensions of the scene and the location of all objects that have a bearing on the case.
- Shows all recovered items and other important features of the scene.
Sketches must include the following:

- **Title block** – the case number, agency number, Name and title of the artist, location of the scene, Date and time the sketch was created.

- **Legend** – Key to identifying and dimensions of objects that may be represented by symbols in the sketch.

- **Compass** – and arrow to denote north in the sketch.

- **Body** - the drawing itself of the layout.
Creating the sketch:

- Define the boundaries.
- Establish known fixed points from which to measure the locations of objects and evidence.
- Walls or boundaries should be drawn in first. Their dimensions should be recorded.
- Measurements should be taken from the fixed points to the pieces of evidence.
3 methods for measuring with 2 points of reference:

- **Rectangulation method:**
  - measures 2 distances to an object that make a right angle to one another (usually 2 walls to the object).
• **Triangulation method**
• Measure the distance to an object from 2 fixed points of known distance from each other.
• Recording the angle formed by the lines within the triangle.
• **Baseline method**
  - 2 fixed objects on opposite sides of the scene are located. A line is measured between these. Each object or piece of evidence has a line drawn from it to the baseline at a 90 degree angle. The distance of this line is then measured.
• Polar coordinates:
  – Uses only 1 reference point. The sketch shows the distance and angle at which the object is located relative to the reference point.
Finished Sketch:

• Constructed with care and concern for aesthetic appearance.
• Must be drawn to scale.
  – Legend contains the scale
  – (ie. ½” = 1’)


• Computer Aided Drafting has become the standard method for reconstructing crime scenes from rough sketches.
  - 3D CAD sketches can also be created of a crime scene.