



Royal Mail Internal Information
Criminal Investigation Team

7.7 Obtaining Fingerprint and Handwriting Specimens

Version 1.0 Final

March 2011

Review Date: March 2013

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Key Accountabilities

Who is accountable?	What do I have to do?	When do I have to do this?	How do I do this?
All members of Royal Mail Security	Ensure you comply with these procedures	Ongoing	As detailed within these procedures

Obtaining Fingerprint and Handwriting Specimens

1. Introduction

- 1.1 These procedures describe how to obtain fingerprint and handwriting specimens from suspects or other persons, rather than the procedures for submitting the specimens for forensic analysis. Those procedures are detailed in 5.1 Forensic Services and Technical Equipment.
- 1.2 Obtaining good quality fingerprint and handwriting specimens can be of paramount importance to a case. As such it is essential that great care is taken when obtaining them, particularly as it is very easy to get it wrong. These procedures will describe the process to be followed when obtaining specimens, however obtaining good quality fingerprints is a skill which needs to be practiced. Accordingly, inexperienced Investigators should practice taking fingerprints from experienced Investigators in order to develop the skill.

2. Obtaining Fingerprints

- 2.1 **Written Consent.** Investigators can take fingerprints as part of an investigation in to criminal offences as long as they have the written consent of the subject.
- 2.2 **Withholds Consent.** If suspects will not give written consent Investigators should note;
- 2.2.1 **England & Wales.** The Police have widespread powers under Section 61 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) (as amended) to take fingerprints without consent from a person detained at a police station in consequence of being arrested for a recordable offence.
- 2.2.2 **Scotland.** The police have powers to take fingerprints in accordance with Section 18 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 (CP(S)) if a suspect is arrested or detained at the police station in accordance with Section 14 of the CP(S).
- 2.2.3 **Northern Ireland.** The Police powers under Section 61 of The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (PACE (NI)) are similar to England and Wales and allow the Police to take fingerprints without consent from people arrested for recordable offence(s).
- 2.3 Offences of theft, opening or delaying postal packets, money laundering and fraud are recordable. Therefore police assistance should be considered if it is thought that the suspect's fingerprints are an important evidential factor in the case and they will not give consent for their fingerprints to be taken.
- 2.4 Should a person consent to their fingerprints being taken the process to be followed depends on whether the fingerprints are requested from;
- 2.4.1 **Suspects.** As it is thought that the presence of their fingerprints in or on a particular item(s) is evidence of an offence, or;
- 2.4.2 **Other Persons.** Not suspected of any criminal offence but their fingerprints are required for "elimination" purposes. That is to say the fingerprints are required to identify legitimate fingerprints on suspected items thus "ruling out" or "eliminating" them from the enquiry. For example, during an investigation into the theft of money from a safe, where fingerprints have been raised on the inside shelves, elimination prints may be taken from

all persons who had legitimate access to the inside of the safe to eliminate these fingerprints from the enquiry.

2.5 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedure for gaining consent to obtain fingerprints is described in paragraphs 2.6 & 2.7 below. In **Scotland** Investigators should inform people why they want to take their fingerprints, make a note of the reasons and then get written consent in their notebooks.

2.6 Obtaining Fingerprints from Suspects. Prior to obtaining consent from suspects they must be informed that the fingerprints;

2.6.1 Will be retained and used only for purposes related to the prevention and detection of a crime, the investigation of an offence or the conduct of a prosecution either nationally or internationally.

2.6.2 Their fingerprints may be checked against other records held by, or on behalf of, relevant law enforcement authorities, either nationally or internationally.

2.6.3 That once they have given consent for their fingerprints to be retained and used they cannot withdraw the consent.

Once informed of the above the suspect should then be asked to complete a Consent to Provide Fingerprints, form GS300.

2.7 Elimination Fingerprints. Prior to obtaining consent for Elimination Fingerprints the person must be informed that;

2.7.1 The fingerprints will be used for elimination purposes only.

2.7.2 The fingerprints will be destroyed at the end of the case.

2.7.3 They will only be compared against the fingerprints in that case.

2.7.4 The Investigator taking the fingerprints may be required to give evidence and/or provide a written statement in relation to the taking of the fingerprints.

2.7.5 The person can witness the destruction of the fingerprints if they request to do so within 5 days of being informed that the fingerprints are to be destroyed.

Once informed of the above the subject should then be asked to complete a Consent to Provide Elimination Fingerprints, form GS300A.

2.8 Once consent is obtained fingerprints should be taken on the Fingerprint Impression form GS301. The first section of the form has an area for "**Rolled**" impressions of the ten fingers and thumbs. The second section is for "**Flat**" impressions and Side B allows for full "**Palm**" impressions to be taken.

2.9 Obtaining Rolled Impressions. The process for completing the rolled impressions is as follows;

2.9.1 The subject's hands should be clean and dry.

2.9.2 Fold the form in order to present the area for the fingerprints on the right hand to be aligned with the edge of the desk. When the right hand has been completed the form should be folded to align the area for the fingerprints on the left hand to be aligned. Ensure that the form is secured to the desk to prevent it moving whilst the prints are being taken.

2.9.3 Ink the subject's thumb and fingers. Each digit should have ink coverage from nail to nail and from the tip of the finger to 4cm down. (Depending on the size of the finger 4cm down will mean that the ink coverage comes somewhere between the first and second crease). Ink strips enabling subject's hands to be inked are available from the Prosecution Support Office (PSO).

2.9.4 In order to take advantage of the natural movement of the forearm the hand should be rotated from the more difficult

position to the easier position. This requires the thumbs to be rolled towards and the fingers away from the centre of the subject's body.

2.9.5 The corresponding digit should be rolled in the corresponding area on the GS301. The subject should be asked to relax and let the Investigator roll the finger. (It is very difficult to take fingerprints if the suspect does not surrender control of their hands to the Investigator.) The finger should be placed on its side and then rolled to the other side until it faces the opposite direction, nail to nail. Generally the weight of the finger is the amount of pressure required to produce good prints. Even pressure should be applied when rolling the finger, taking care to lift each finger after rolling to avoid smudging. Do not roll back and forth as the fingerprint will be smudged.

2.9.6 When producing an impression of a single digit it is advisable to ask the subject to tuck away the other fingers or thumb on the hand.

2.10 Below is an example of a rolled impression. Note that the width of the impression is much wider than a flat impression as it is rolled from nail to nail. (A flat image of the same finger is at paragraph 2.12 below.)



Rolled Impression

2.11 Taking Flat Impressions. Following the rolled impressions the subject should be asked produce flat impressions as follows;

2.11.1 Re-apply ink to the subject's fingers ensuring that the fingers are inked inline to 9cm below the tip of the middle finger.

2.11.2 Ensure that the bottom of the form is in line with the desk.

2.11.3 Hold the subject's wrist in one hand and using light pressure with the other hand press all four fingers of each hand within the relevant space. The fingers should be together and the middle finger should be placed 0.5cm below the line.

2.11.4 The fingers should be removed directly from the form ensuring that the subject does not smudge the impressions.

2.11.5 A flat impression of the whole length of each thumb should then be taken.

The purpose of the flat impressions is to confirm that the rolled impressions have been taken in the right order.

2.12 Below is an example of a flat impression. Note that it is only the width of the finger.



Flat Impression

- 2.13 Taking Palm Prints.** Once the flat impressions have been taken the whole of the subject's palms should be taken as follows;
- 2.13.1** The subject's palms should be inked.
 - 2.13.2** They should then be asked to only apply light pressure and place the palms of their hands flat in the relevant space on side B, as near to the middle of the Fingerprint Impression Form GS301 as practicable.
 - 2.13.3** Again the hands should then be lifted directly off the form to prevent smudging.
 - 2.13.4** Once the flat palm impressions have been obtained then impressions of the edge of the palm should be taken. If there is space on side B of the GS301 then they should be placed alongside the flat palm impressions. If not then a further sheet of A4 paper should be used. (The edge of the palm is known as the "writers" palm as it is the part of the palm that would be in contact with the surface whilst writing).
- 2.14** Whilst taking the impressions the Investigator should ensure that the quality is such that the characteristics of the fingerprint can be seen with the naked eye. There should not be any smudges or blotches of ink. If so the ridges will not be apparent. The quality of the fingerprints should be as in the images at paragraph 2.10 and 2.12 above. If not the subject should be re-fingerprinted.
- 2.15** If it is not possible to fingerprint a thumb and four fingers on each hand then the corresponding box on the GS301 should be annotated. For example, if the left middle finger is missing annotate "Finger Missing" in the left middle finger box.
- 3. Obtaining Handwriting Specimens**
- 3.1.** To achieve the best results from handwriting specimens it is important that these procedures are followed as closely as practicable.
 - 3.2.** The writing which is to be examined is known as the "**Questioned Handwriting**". Investigators have no control over the amount and nature of the Questioned Handwriting available for examination. They do however have control over the amount, nature and quality of the Specimen Handwriting given by the suspect, should they consent to give handwriting specimens. By giving the Document Examiner the best possible specimens Investigators will maximise the possibility of obtaining a useful conclusion.
 - 3.3.** There are two types of specimen handwriting:

- 3.3.1 Requested.** This is specimens taken by the Investigator specifically for the investigation.
- 3.3.2 Non-Requested.** This is writing produced by the suspect on some other occasion.
- 3.4 Requested.** When requesting specimens the following should be observed;
- 3.4.1 Like with Like.** Document Examiners can only effectively make like with like comparisons. A's can only be compared with A's, B's with B's etc. In addition specimens should be taken on separate documents similar to those in question. For a case involving an envelope, take specimens on similarly sized envelopes. For a case involving fraudulent application forms take specimens on the relevant blank application forms. Study the questioned material and prepare before an interview with a suspect by considering the following.
- 3.4.2 Writing Instrument.** Always obtain specimens with a well-used ball point pen. If the questioned writing has been produced using a writing implement other than a ball point pen, then obtain additional specimens using a similar writing instrument.
- 3.4.3 Amount.** Investigators should seek to obtain a minimum of 10 specimens of handwriting, unless the questioned handwriting is a signature, when at least 15 specimens should be taken. When the questioned document contains a large amount of handwriting, extracts of the text can be dictated, (the same text should be dictated for each specimen). Investigators should however ensure that the dictated text includes all the characters seen in the questioned writing.
- 3.4.4 Writing Surface.** Provide a suitable writing surface to rest on e.g. a pad of paper.
- 3.5 Obtaining the specimens.** The procedures for obtaining specimens are as follows;
- 3.5.1 Cover up the Questioned Document.** A suspect must never be shown the questioned document(s) whilst providing specimens.
- 3.5.2 Normal Handwriting.** Investigators should ask suspects to produce specimens of their normal handwriting. When asking suspects to use their normal writing do not ask them to do 'joined-up' writing or small letters not joined as this will often result in the writing being produced unnaturally. The only exception to this is if the questioned handwriting is in block capitals then the specimens should be in block capitals.
- 3.5.3 Always Dictate.** Dictate specimens at a reasonable speed to increase the possibility of the suspect producing their "natural" handwriting. During the course of an examination the Document Examiner will compare, amongst other things, date styles, layout, wording used, spelling mistakes etc. For this reason, please ensure that the wording used in the dictation has not caused a similarity to occur. This is particularly important when dictating cheques. For example, if the amount in words on the cheque reads "Ten pounds, and 52 pence only", do not dictate "Ten pounds comma and in numbers fifty two pence only full stop". Instead ask the suspect to make the cheque payable for ten pounds fifty two.
- 3.5.4 Remove Specimens from Sight.** Remove each specimen from sight as soon as it is completed.
- 3.5.5 Obtain Specimens at Different Times.** It is good practice to ask for specimens at different times during the interview and as such ask the suspect to note the date and time on the sample, away from the specimen writing.

- 3.6 Standard Handwriting Specimens.** If the Investigator is in the position where the content of the questioned document cannot be disclosed to the suspect then the suspect should be asked to write the following.

Very sorry I'm out but I've had to drive Mrs. Dixon from no 758 to the hospital. If anyone asks after her, tell them that they have to phone [GRO] for enquiries.

I won't be back until about 4.45, so please go to the bank and draw out one hundred and fifty pounds cash – we need it for tomorrow. Also, while you are in town can you get some shopping for me.

<i>2 jars mixed pickles</i>	<i>1 box of tea bags (160)</i>
<i>1 dozen eggs (size 4)</i>	<i>Tomato sauce (a squeeze bottle)</i>
<i>Washing up liquid</i>	<i>3 quick setting jellies (yellow)</i>
<i>2 jars strawberry jam</i>	<i>3 kitchen rolls</i>
<i>Extra strong mints (3 pack)</i>	<i>20 cigarettes</i>

- 3.7 Non Requested Specimens** These are writings made by the suspect during the course of their everyday life. The same "like with like" principles apply as far as possible as with request specimens.
- 3.8 Non Request specimens** normally contain the suspect's natural handwriting and are, therefore, often the most suitable specimens for comparison. Whilst it may be necessary for non request specimens to be provable and admissible in court, a Document Examiner can often compare non request specimens with request specimens and determine if they were produced by the same person.
- 3.9 Specimens from a Person Other than a Suspect.** There may be occasions when specimens from persons other than your suspect are essential. In particular, if a signature is suspected of being a forgery, Investigators should always obtain specimens from the person in whose name the document is signed.

Change Control

Status	Final
Version	1.0
Owner	Ray Pratt
Author	Michael F Matthews
Release Date	March 2011
Document Privacy	Internal

Authorisation

Title	Name	Signature	Date
Security	Ray Pratt		March 2011

Distribution List

Name	Version	Date
All Royal Mail Security via Security Sharepoint	V1	March 2011

Documentation History

Issue	V.1				
Status	Final				
Release Date	Mar 11				
Effective From	Mar 11				

Document Change History

Issue / Version	Summary of Change
V1	Document Produced

Glossary

Abbreviation or Term	Meaning
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
PACE (NI)	Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989
CP(S)	Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995
PSO	Prosecution Support Office

Document Summary

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