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REQUESTED WRITING ©



When insufficient handwriting samples exist to conduct an examination, it may be necessary to request that a person write additional samples. Request writing is provided either on a voluntary basis or by court order, and is provided specifically for the purpose of comparison to a Questioned document.

WARNING



Having someone write his/her name ten times on a sheet of paper is not the way to take requested writing. It does not provide an adequate sample. The following explains why.

Advantage

The advantage of taking requested writing samples is having the ability to control the amount and types of samples collected. Requested writing also allow the document examiner to observe the writer in the act of writing.

Disadvantage

The disadvantage of taking request writing samples is they can be self serving and subject to disguise. If you are not experienced in obtaining requesting writing, have a document examiner collect the samples, or at the very least, assist you in using the proper procedure.

Controlled Environment

In order to obtain request writing in a fair and unbiased manner, the individual taking the samples should be well versed in the methodology of gathering exemplars. Things to consider include but are not limited to:

- Range of body positions and postures - standing, seated, writing against a wall, on a lap, etc.
- Variety of substrates - smooth, uneven, hard surface, padded resistance
- Similar writing paper - lined, unlined, bond, rag, cardboard, etc.
- Document format – check, contract, credit card invoice, envelope, anonymous note, etc.
- Writing implement – ballpoint, felt tip, gel pen, pencil, marker, spray paint, etc.
- Content - words, letter combinations, phrasing, numerals, tags, etc.

The best standards closely emulate the circumstances, material and content of the questioned document (standing at a counter, holding a clipboard, etc.).

Specific words, letter combinations, numerals, etc may be crucial to your case. When taking exemplars, make sure you prepare a text that will include similar content. Ask your document

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examiner to customize a form to allow you to capture these details in as natural a writing circumstance as possible. Also ask your examiner to provide general forms and formats used in taking requested writing.

Gather All Materials

Prepare your text and assemble the proper materials in advance so you do not have to stop the session. Have on hand blank paper, lined paper, a variety of writing implements, and any necessary pre-printed forms. The subject may provide his own pen or pencil and should be allowed to use it for the first writing sample, and possibly others.

Warm Up

Have the subject do some free writing to loosen up (writing about a favorite hobby, pet, auto, vacation, etc.). Note the natural speed at which the subject writes.

As the subject completes a page, have him sign and date it, and remove it from view. Take care to number each writing sample on the reverse, so your document examiner will know in what order they were written.

After the free writing, you might want to provide a form which contains all the letters of the alphabet, numerals, etc., which your document examiner can provide. Allow the subject to select a different pen. If the questioned writing was done in ballpoint, make sure some of your samples are written ballpoint, etc.

Prior Exposure to the Document

If the subject has seen the questioned document, the requested writing can be compromised. Once exposed, the subject possesses foreknowledge of what pictorial patterns he should not include in his writing, and can thus alter or disguise his writing accordingly. Refer to the document verbally. If you must, show the suspect the document briefly, follow by showing him several other documents, so he will “forget” the visual of the questioned signature/writing.

Dictate

Dictation has been found to produce the most natural representation of the writer’s true handwriting style. If you have watched the subject write in warm up, you will have an idea of the pacing to use when dictating. Do NOT offer advice or answer questions with regard to punctuation or spelling. If asked, respond “Just do your best. Do what you would normally do.” If you’re told the person has never heard of a specific word, instruct him to just “do your best.” (One case I worked on involving hate mail had a very unique use of punctuation, and was instrumental in identifying the writer.)

Providing False Samples

It is not uncommon for a guilty party to attempt to alter his normal style of writing in an effort to render the samples useless. Any number of ploys can be used from elaborate curlicues, to block printing to writing with the opposite hand. Of course, if the questioned writing appears to be disguised, (often is the case with hate mail and threats) you’ll want to request exemplars in block printing or non-dominant hand writing as well.

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Taking an unusually long time to execute a simple sentence can be a tip-off that the subject is attempting to formulate a disguised writing. If the subject continues to take an unnaturally long time, offer to sit alongside him and write a page yourself, demonstrating how “easy” requested writing can be. Have a colleague or assistant dictate the words. If the subject is unnaturally slow, it will become readily apparent. If the subject speeds up in an effort to keep up with you, he may revert to writing in his natural style and speed.

In an effort to stop the writing session, some subjects will complain of hand cramping and *wish to take a break*. If they leave the room they may refer to a copy of the questioned document. Do your best to complete all exemplar writing in one sitting.

Obtain an Adequate Sample

It's better to deal with taking breaks, however, than to have the subject depart without providing an adequate sample. The longer a subject continues to write, the greater the likelihood his genuine writing style will surface. Once the hand becomes tired or concentration lags, the subject is more likely to “slip” into his own writing style. An experienced document examiner is experienced in gauging how long a subject needs to write in order to obtain an adequate sample.

Be prepared. Have more forms than you think you'll need on hand. As discussed, as each handwriting sample is completed, remove it from view. If the subject is attempting to change his writing style with each new document he won't remember what style he has already employed, and will soon begin to repeat patterns.

Depending on the nature of Questioned document, you may need to request that the subject write in cursive, printing, block printing or the opposite hand. If the subject claims they can't, request they “Just do the best they can.”

Range of Variation

Because you're collecting handwriting at a single sitting, it can be helpful to allow the subject to stand and stretch after a few writing samples, to change pens, change chairs etc. which allows the subject to adjust his posture, arm position, angle to the paper, grip on the pen, etc. This allows the person to provide you with a more natural range of variation in their writing. As discussed in the opening warning, writing one name ten times on a single sheet of paper is akin to having one sample. It does not allow for variety, flexibility and range of variation which changes in posture and pen can provide.