

The Document Examination discipline, or Questioned Documents as it is also known, has been used to resolve questions regarding documents for several decades in nearly all types of investigative cases, such as death investigations, threats, and robberies. Analysts in the Document Examination Section examine any type of evidence that conveys a message, in order to determine the source or establish authenticity. Document examiners do not examine handwriting for personality traits or to determine an individual's state of mind or intent behind authoring a document.

Handwriting expertise has been accepted by the U.S. courts since the early 1800's, while ink and typewriter examination testimony first entered the court records in the 1890's. Significant improvement in deciphering inks using alternate light sources was observed in the 1930's. As printers and other office machines were developed and used to create documents, Document Examiners studied and developed techniques to identify the class and individual characteristics of these machines and testify to their analysis. As technology has advanced, such as electronic signatures, so too has document examination.

One of the most famous early cases to involve document examination was the kidnapping and murder of the 20-month-old son of pilot Charles Lindbergh in 1932. The case involved several ransom notes demanding money for the safe return of his son. Bruno Hauptmann was determined to be a suspect through the tracing of the ransom money. Numerous Document Examiners testified to the identity of Bruno Hauptmann as the writer of the ransom notes. At the end of the trial Mr. Hauptman proclaimed the handwriting examination to be the strongest evidence in the case against him. This case brought awareness across the world to the value of handwriting comparison.

One of the more interesting recent cases involving document examination stemmed from a man suing Mark Zuckerberg for a substantial stake in Facebook®, based on the existence of a two-page contract. Document examiners demonstrated that the contract showed unusual differences between the fonts and spacing from one page to the other, suggesting that they had been prepared at different times. The examiners also concluded that attempts had been made to age the pages artificially. A federal judge dismissed the lawsuit in 2014 on the grounds that the contract was not genuine.

Document Examination evidence can often be seen as a puzzle that may require the use of multiple types of examinations. Using science, document examiners use preservation and examination techniques and procedures to discover minute and often over-looked details. As a result, the examiner is able to give valuable information about an alleged crime or the context in which a crime may have been committed.