CRIME SCENE SKETCHING

Before the jury hears testimony about conditions at a crime scene, before blood evidence is collected for DNA analysis, before latent fingerprint development begins, even before the area around a body is combed for clues, the crime scene is documented by sketching and photography.

There are two phases to crime scene sketching - the rough sketch (draft) and the finished sketch (draft). The most common view used in crime scene sketches is the “bird’s eye” view. This is the view of the scene as from directly above. Which does not include the appearance or contents of vertical surfaces like walls or cabinets. An elevation is the view from the side, and is always accompanied by the cardinal direction. For example, a particular view may be “the elevation of the north wall of the living room, Smith residence, 1313 Mockingbird Lance, 01 Jan 2009” The address, date and your initials must be on each sketch, in addition to any other “chain of custody documentation.

During the initial evaluation of the scene, an investigator must select two points of reference like “the north exterior wall” or a window or “the main entry door.” These must be immovable, permanent feature of the building or landscape. To generate a rough sketch, the investigator measures the dimensions of the space and uses these points to accurately characterize the contents of the scene. Major items of interest, like a body or a weapon, are located in reference to these points. For example, the investigator may select the south exterior wall of a home and the back door, located in the kitchen, as two points of reference in a crime scene focused on the kitchen and stairs to the basement. The sketch should begin with the dimensions of the room(s) involved and the footprint of the dwelling, as well as the orientation of the building to due north as it would appear on a map. The property surrounding the building, like the distance to a road, other buildings, or vehicles, may also be relevant to the investigation, so communication with the other investigators on scene is important during this portion of the crime scene analysis.

Once the floor plan of the building is documented, the specific contents are recorded. You must be sure to search the room in a methodical way, which is most commonly done by walking in a circle around the room, spiraling clockwise toward the center. Furniture, blood spatter, bodies, weapons, and any other items of interest should be included on the drawing with the distance from each item to the two reference points determined earlier. It is not necessary to draw each item. Rather, a letter or number should be assigned to each and then included in the sketch. Be sure to correlate the letter or number with the photographs as well.

Any details like odors, sounds, or other facts not encompassed by the sketch should be recorded in your notebook. The level of detail should be sufficient to adequately refresh your memory when and if you are called to testify in court. After the scene has been properly documented, a finished sketch is prepared in a controlled environment, like back in the lab or the office, or in your case at home! It should be a neat version of the rough sketch clearly drawn to scale. Computer programs or printed cut-and-paste kits are also used by some law enforcement agencies to generate finished sketches.
YOUR ASSIGNMENT

1. Generate a finished sketch from the rough sketch attached.

2. It is necessary to draw the room to scale, meaning that the distance recorded in the rough sketch are the same proportion in the finished sketch. This can easily be accomplished by using graph paper. Remember, the utility of the finished sketch is that it will be entered into evidence and will be presented in court if and when the case goes to trial.

3. Note the location of any “evidence” you discover. Include those measurements in your sketch.

4. Indicate the length along each wall, as well as the exact location and size of items like sofas, chairs, and tables. Remember, your sketch will have to provide orientation within the crime scene to other investigators months and years from now-so make it as detailed and as accurate as you can.

5. Your finished sketch should correct any mistakes from the rough draft. This gives you the opportunity to present a clean, clearly arranged diagram of the scene. Be sure to include the address, time, date, (T/P/O) and your name on each and every sketch generated during your investigation. Also include the items of evidence listed on the sketch and indicate the location using the assigned letter (a legend).

6. On the reverse of your finished sketch, list the physical evidence you believe may be relevant to this investigation and make recommendations about how each should be tested (i.e., sent to DNA laboratory, examined for trace, dusted for fingerprints, collected and taken to the laboratory for tool marks or footprint comparison, etc.). You may want to set it up in a table format similar to this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Suggested Method of Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Adapted from Sirchie Fingerprint Laboratories, Crime Scene Sketching and Digital Photography