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Best Practice Recommendations for the Verification Component in Friction Ridge Examination

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Academy Standards Board
410 North 21st Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80904

Foreword

This document has been developed with the objective of improving the quality and consistency of friction ridge examination practices.

This document was revised, prepared, and finalized as a standard by the Friction Ridge Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Friction Ridge Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science.

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The following applies to all ASB documents:

the term **'shall'** indicates that a provision is mandatory, and can be audited for compliance

the term **'should'** indicates that a provision is not mandatory, but recommended as good practice.

All hyperlinks and web addresses shown in this document are current as of the publication date of this standard.

Keywords: *verification, blind verification, open verification, consensus*

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Best Practice Recommendations for the Verification Component in Friction Ridge Examination

1 Scope

This document provides best practice recommendations for how to conduct the verification phase during friction ridge impression examinations. These recommendations apply to both suitability determinations and resulting conclusions addressing verification considerations (e.g., extent, utility, case type, approach), types of verification and application options, and documentation.

This document does not address technical review.

2 Normative References

There are no normative reference documents.

3 Terms and Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

3.1
blind verification
A type of verification in which the subsequent examiner(s) has no knowledge of the original examiner's decisions, conclusions or observed data used to support the conclusion.

3.2
consensus opinion
A type of examination in which a reported decision or conclusion is determined that reflects the collective judgment (e.g., majority) of a group of examiners

3.3
Forensic Service Provider
FSP
A forensic science entity or forensic science practitioner providing forensic science services.

3.4
non-conforming work
Work that does not comply with FSP policies and procedures.

3.5
open (non-blind) verification
A type of verification in which the subsequent examiner has access to the original examiner's decisions, conclusions or observed data used to support the conclusion.

3.6
quality assurance measures
Steps taken by an FSP to detect and correct non-conforming work. This may include, but is not limited to, root cause analysis, additional verification, non-conformity assessment, audits and corrective and/or preventative actions.

3.7
suitability for comparison decision (suitability for source conclusions)
A decision made by an examiner in accordance with FSP policy and/or procedure, that a friction ridge impression contains sufficient observed data to be utilized for comparison and a source conclusion can potentially be reached. This designation is often referred to as "suitable for comparison" or "of value for comparison".

3.8
verification
Confirmation, through either re-examination or review of documented data by another examiner, that a conclusion or opinion conforms to specified requirements and is reproducible.

NOTE "Specified requirements" are the FSP's policies and procedures relating to analysis, comparison, and evaluation of friction ridge impressions.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Verification is a quality control measure that can be applied as the final phase of friction ridge examination. During verification, a second examiner reviews the friction ridge impressions to determine if the original examiner's conclusions are supported by the data in the impressions.

4.2 Verification should include the independent examination of one or more friction ridge impressions, by another examiner, to evaluate a conclusion or opinion.

4.3 Verification should apply to all decisions including utility (e.g., suitability determinations) and examination conclusions. At a minimum, verification shall apply to all source identification, support for same source and source exclusion conclusions.[1]

4.4 FSPs may choose to verify suitability determinations before the comparison phase of the ACE process continues.

4.5 The decision to use a method other than open (non-blind) verification may be based on case circumstances and/or case type (e.g., person vs. property crime; high profile; complex comparisons).

4.6 FSPs should conduct enhanced verification (i.e., blind, multiple, etc.) when a single 'Source Identification' or 'Support for Same Source' conclusion has been drawn to a particular individual after an ABIS search. This is due to the greater risk of error in these types of cases.

4.7 There are different types of verification available. There have been limited studies on whether open or blind verification is more likely to detect errors in latent print examinations, but the broader scientific community suggests that blind verification is a better way to assess consistency (reliability) across examiners and believed to be more likely to detect errors. FSPs should balance any advantage of blind verification (for quality control purposes) against the additional time it may require. Therefore, the type of verification used should be determined by the FSP in accordance with their quality assurance measures and stated in the case documentation. These types include, but may not be limited to blind verification or open (non-blind) verification.

[1] This is not intended to include all individual candidates generated as a result of a database search (e.g., ABIS).

4.7.1 Blind Verification—A type of verification in which the subsequent examiner(s) has no knowledge of the original examiner's decisions, conclusions or observed data used to support the conclusion – at the time the examiner is conducting the blind verification. Blind verification should involve a completely independent reapplication and documentation of ACE by the subsequent examiner(s). FSPs should have a policy defining the circumstances in which blind verification will be required. At a minimum, blind verification should be used in the following scenarios:

a) single-identification (or 'support for same source') ABIS searches to a particular individual;

b) high-profile cases (due to greater potential for bias);

c) simultaneity identification based on aggregate (no single impression stands alone for identification);

d) complex impressions or comparisons (low quality, high ambiguity, distortion, etc. as defined by FSP policy); and

e) verifier discretion (first examiner concludes 'inconclusive' or 'support for same source', verifier concludes 'identification', third examination may be blind to mitigate bias).

NOTE Access to the original examiner's decisions, conclusions, and data may occur once the blind verification is completed and documented, e.g., sequential unmasking.

4.7.2 Open (non-blind) verification—A type of verification in which the subsequent examiner has access to the original examiner's decisions, conclusions or observed data used to support the conclusion. Open verification should also involve an independent reapplication and documentation of ACE; however, the subsequent examiner(s) may review the documented observations produced by the original examiner. Open verification may be used when none of the suggested criteria stated for blind verification are present.

4.8 Consensus opinion is an additional quality control measure. It is a type of examination in which a reported decision or conclusion is determined that reflects the collective judgment (e.g., majority) of a group of examiners. This is achieved through independent examination (open or blind) by multiple examiners and subsequent discussion/determination. FSPs should have a policy defining the circumstances in which consensus opinion will be required. At a minimum, consensus opinion should be used in complex comparisons (low quality, high ambiguity, distortion).

4.9 Contemporaneous documentation of the verification shall be included in the case record. This documentation should be commensurate with the complexity level of the examination (e.g., more complex comparisons will require more extensive documentation).

4.10 The FSP shall have a policy to address non-conforming work.

4.11 The FSP shall have a policy to address conflicting analysis (suitability, search parameters) decisions and conflicting examination conclusions.

5 Procedural Recommendations

5.1 Determine if the verification is to be open or blind.

5.1.1 If open, then the verifier receives the original examination documentation and conclusion.

5.1.2 If blind, then the verifier only receives unmarked images of the questioned and exemplar impressions. If the digital processing of those images introduces any potential bias to the blind verifier, then only un-enhanced images should be provided.

5.2 For open verification, the verifier should conduct and document an independent ACE prior to reviewing the data originally used to support the reported conclusion (e.g., image annotations, bench notes)[2] . The verifier should ensure that the data are carefully weighed under both propositions (same or different sources), being mindful that consideration of only one proposition can lead to confirmation bias error.

5.3 For blind verification, the verifier should conduct and document an independent ACE on two or more unmarked friction ridge impressions (e.g., questioned and exemplar).

5.4 After either open or blind verification, it is necessary to determine if the examiner and verifier support the same conclusion. If so, then the verification is complete. If support for the same conclusion is lacking, then the examiner and verifier enter into conflict resolution procedure.

NOTE Current research has demonstrated that erroneous exclusions are the most commonly observed error. Verification is a vital process for helping mitigate this error. Closed database searching can be an effective verification tool when specific persons of interest are provided for comparison. A database of only these persons is created and then the questioned impressions are searched using ABIS algorithms against this closed database. This may be useful as an additional quality control measure when either source exclusion or support for different source conclusions have been drawn.

[2] The ASB FRCB recognizes that some FSPs allow the verifier to reference the documented observations produced by the original examiner without conducting an independent ACE. FSPs that utilize this approach must be sensitive to confirmation bias.

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