

## Report Writing

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You need to follow a standard protocol in preparing your reports.  
Document examiners need to support their opinions that are given on the cases we examine.  
Always give an oral report first.  
Only prepare a report if the client wants it.  
Upon completion of your examination, give the client an oral opinion and ask if he or she wants a written opinion.

## Types of Reports

### Letter of Opinion

A letter addressed to client with your conclusion and generic reasons.

### Affidavit

A sworn statement with your opinion.

### Report

A more detailed explanation of your opinion including detailed reasons for your opinion.

Lately I have seen more detailed reports by some document examiners. They give their opinion and include exhibits to support their opinion.

These reports can easily reach 100 pages as the examiners include copies of every document that they have examined in their case.

These reports have generated large incomes for the examiners.

When I first got into this business over 40 years ago, I was told to only put in my conclusions and not my reasons for my opinion. Now, detailed reports have become more common and cases are settled without going to court.

An affidavit can be a separate document or it can be a statement attached to a letter of opinion:

Example:

*I, Katherine M. Koppenhaver, do solemnly declare and affirm that the foregoing statements of fact are true and correct.*

## **AFFIDAVIT**

*I HEREBY AFFIRM UNDER THE PENALTIES OF PERJURY AS FOLLOWS:*

*1. My name is Katherine Mainolfi Koppenhaver. My address is 403 Haslett Road, Joppa, Maryland 21085. I am over the age of 18 and competent to testify. Attached hereto and incorporated herein as Exhibit A is a copy of my Curriculum Vitae that sets forth my background and experience that qualifies me to undertake the examination requested and render the opinions given in this report. The facts and qualifications referred to therein are true and I am a competent court-qualified Certified Document Examiner.*

Double space the paragraphs in an affidavit.

## Essential Parts of Report

## State the Problem

What have you been asked to do?

Ex: “*You have asked me to determine if Dorita Downs’ signature is genuine;*” or  
“*You have asked me if the questioned signature was written by Dorita Downs.*”  
“*You have asked me to determine the author of the poison pen letter.*”

## Describe the Documents

You need sufficient details so that all documents can be easily distinguished from all other documents.

### Questioned

Describe the documents such as “*Signature of Dorita Down’s on Page 3 of a Contract of Sale, dated 4/5/05.*” Copy.

Number of Pages “*Signature on Page 3 of 5.*”

State the date of each document.

State whether the document is an Original or Copy.

### Identify the Documents

Use designations such as:

Q for Questioned.

“*Q-1: Signature of Dorita Downs on a Contract, dated 4/5/05.*”

Or use any other designation.

*DD-2: Signature of Dorita Downs, etc.*

## Describe comparables

Use the same type of description for exemplars as for questioned documents.

“*K-1: Signature of Dorita Downs on a Deed of Trust dated 4/5/05. Original.*”

K for Known. S for Standards, E for Exemplars, or use initials such as JD-1 for *John Doe*.

## Describe Procedures

Equipment used

Stereoscopic microscope

Magnifiers

Type of lighting

Measuring instruments

The documents were examined using magnification and strong lighting. All of the handwriting characteristics were compared between the known writing and the questioned writing.

## Essential Parts of Report

Method of Operation

Internal comparison of Q and K

Comparability of Q and K

Same Allographs

Suitable time frame

Internally consistent

Similarities and Differences between Q and K

## EXAMINATION CONDUCTED

The first step in the examination of handwriting is to determine if the questioned writing contains enough complexity to make it difficult to copy. Complexity is measured by the number of changes of direction of the writing line and the intersections that occur in the writing.

The exemplars are then compared to the questioned writing to determine if they are suitable for comparison.

Suitability is based upon the same type of writing, handwriting versus handwriting, and handprinting compared to handprinting although some similar characteristics can be found when comparing handwriting to handprinting.

Ideally, exemplars should be written within two years of the questioned handwriting although some writing samples outside the two-year range can also assist us in making a determination.

## EXAMINATION CONDUCTED

All of the handwriting characteristics are then compared between the questioned and known writing to determine if the handwriting is genuine, disguised or simulated. The handwriting was examined and compared using magnification.

## ESSENTIAL PARTS of REPORT

### EXAMINATION CONDUCTED

*“An examination following standard procedures was made of the questioned handwriting and the signatures verified to be that of John Doe to determine if the questioned handwriting is genuine. The handwriting was examined and compared using magnification.”*

Always qualify your opinion

*“Based on the documents submitted, the evidence supports my opinion submitted to a reasonable degree to scientific certainty”*

*“Subject to examination of the original,”*

## ESSENTIAL PARTS of REPORT

State Opinion

### CONCLUSION:

*“Based on the documents submitted, the evidence supports my opinion to a reasonable degree of scientific certainty that the handwriting of Dorita Downs that appears on the Questioned Document is genuine.”*

State Basic Principle of Handwriting ID

*“In order to establish that handwriting was written by a particular person, an examination with known genuine handwriting must show substantial agreement in sufficient handwriting characteristics to identify the maker and eliminate the possibility of any other writer. The handwriting characteristics that are evaluated include line quality, pressure patterns, rhythm, slant, size and proportions, utilization of space and spatial alignment, initial and terminal strokes, writing speed, legibility, skill level, letter forms, types of connectors, method of construction, and pattern formations.”*

State the Basic Principle of Handwriting ID

An examination is always a two-part process.

*There must be sufficient similarities to make an identification. "Any significant unexplainable differences will be sufficient to eliminate the writer."*

**COMMENTS:**

*"There are sufficient similarities between the questioned handwriting and the exemplars to make an identification. There are no significant differences."*

or

*"There are significant differences between the questioned handwriting and the exemplars."*

Always ask to see original documents.

*"I reserve the right to examine any originals that are in existence to substantiate my findings."*

Limit report to the documents examined. Emphasize that you are limiting your opinion based upon the documents that you have examined.

or

*"I would like to review the original questioned document. However, based upon the quality of the documents that you have provided, the lack of originals does not materially affect my analysis."*

Therefore, if other documents surface that cause a change in your opinion, you will be correct in your original opinion.

**Exhibits**

State that you will create exhibits to graphically support your opinion.

*"My staff will prepare exhibits to graphically demonstrate how I came to my opinion in this case. These exhibits will be used to support my opinion in court or deposition."*

Exhibits may be included in the report.

*"The Long-Term Care Patient Activity Report was altered by whiting out the '0' of the date, 10/1/06 and replacing it with a '2'."*

The photographs of the October 27, 2006 Will were taken of the original Will. This can be determined by studying the pattern of colored dots created by the photograph. The photograph of a photograph contains more colored dots than a photograph of an original document.

**CONCLUSION:**

*Based on the documents submitted, the evidence supports my opinion that the Q-1 is an altered duplicate of K-1.*

*Based on the documents submitted and subject to examination of the original, the evidence supports my opinion that the writer of the known writing authored the questioned signature.*

**Testimony**

State willingness to testify.

*"Please notify me as soon as you have obtained a court date so I can place that date on my court schedule."*

## Qualifications

State that you are adding your CV to show that you have the qualifications to render opinions.

*“Attached is a copy of my current statement of qualifications which sets forth my background and experience that qualifies me to undertake the examination requested and render the opinions given in this report.”*

## SWGDOC

SWGDOC stands for The Scientific Working Group for Document Examiners.

This group was started by government document examiners in 1997.

For over 20 years they have been establishing standards for the industry.

From 2000 to 2012 SWGDOC published their standards through the Questioned Document Section of the American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM).

Now they are self-publishing the standards.

## Guidelines for Opinions

Standard Terminology for Expressing Conclusions of Forensic Document Examiners written by Thomas McAlexander

### SWGDOC Guidelines for Opinions

Identification – highest degree of confidence. No reservations.

*“It is my opinion that the writer of the known material authored the questioned document.”*

Highly probable – the evidence is very persuasive but some element is missing.

*“It is highly probably that John Doe authored the questioned document.”*

Probable – the evidence indicates the writer of the questioned authored the known but there is some limitation.

*“John Doe probably signed the questioned document.”*

Indications – It is more likely than not that the questioned writing was written by the writer.

*“There is evidence that John Doe may have authored the questioned document.”*

No conclusion –

*“It cannot be determined who wrote the questioned material.”*

*“No conclusion can be reached as to who authored the question document.”*

Indications did not – a weak opinion.

*“The evidence suggests that John Doe did not write the questioned material.”*

Probably did not.

Strong probability did not.

Elimination.

### SWGDOC Guidelines for Opinions

Do Not Use these Terms:

Possible, could have.

Consistent with.

Could not be identified, cannot identify.

Similarities were noted.  
Cannot be associated, cannot be connected.  
No identification.  
Inconclusive.  
Positive identification.  
Reason to Believe.  
Qualified Identification.

## Declaration

1. I understand that my overriding duty is to the court both in preparing reports and in giving oral evidence.
2. I have set out in my report what I understand from those instructing me to be the questions in respect of which my opinion as an expert is required.
3. I have done my best, in preparing this report, to be accurate and complete. I have mentioned all matters which I regard as relevant to the opinions I have expressed. All of the matters on which I have expressed an opinion lie within my field of expertise.
4. I have drawn to the attention of the court all matters, of which I am aware, which might adversely affect my opinion.
5. Wherever I have no personal knowledge, I have indicated the source of factual information.
6. I have not included anything in this report which has been suggested to me by anyone, including the lawyers instructing me, without forming my own independent view of the matter.
7. Where, in my view, there is a range of reasonable opinion, I have indicated the extent of that range in my report.
8. At the time of signing the report I consider it to be complete and accurate. I will notify those instructing me if, for any reason, I subsequently consider that the report requires any correction or qualification.
9. I understand that this report will be evidence that I will give under oath, subject to any correction or qualification I may make before swearing to its veracity.

I believe that the facts I have stated in this report are true and that the opinions I have expressed are correct.

## Summary:

Following these recommendations will enable you to present a professional appearance.