

Jacqueline T. FISH

|

Jonathon FISH

CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION CASE STUDIES

*Step by Step from
the Crime Scene
to the Courtroom*





Crime Scene Investigation Case Studies

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to the Courtroom

Jacqueline T. Fish and Jonathon Fish

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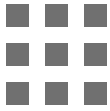
Foreword

Have you ever heard the adage, “The job isn’t finished until the paperwork is done”? Without question, nowhere is this truer than in the field of criminal investigations. It is also true that the paperwork of any criminal investigation is absolutely vital for the proper administration of justice, where the innocent are protected and the guilty are held responsible for their illegal actions. You may be the greatest criminal investigator on the face of the earth, but if the paperwork in your case files is disorganized, incoherent, and doesn’t accurately, truthfully, and concisely reflect every aspect of your criminal investigation, then all of your hard work may be for naught and justice may be averted. When you are a criminal investigator, what you do or fail to do with your assigned criminal investigations, and this includes your paperwork, can have life or death consequences. The public has entrusted a great responsibility to our criminal investigators, and it is our sworn duty to do everything, within the law, to protect that trust.

With regards to the who, what, where, why, and how of criminal investigative paperwork, many jurisdictions provide only “in house” training, specific to their jurisdiction. Much of this training is “informal,” “on the job” training and is administered by senior investigators, who are assigned to tutor the new investigator. This type of training typically has inconsistent effects, and has the potential of passing on the habits, good and bad, of the senior investigator providing the training. While there will always be some jurisdictional differences involved in criminal investigative paperwork, there are far more universal aspects of criminal investigative paperwork that will be found in all criminal case files, regardless of the jurisdiction, and this text will highlight these best practices.

This text will provide readers with validated, standardized methodologies for completing thorough criminal investigative case files, regardless of the type of crime and jurisdiction, by highlighting actual case studies of different crimes and their associated investigative paperwork. The information presented in this text will form the ideal, non-bias foundation for future criminal investigators and newly assigned criminal investigators, as well as acting as a great refresher for experienced criminal investigators. When you are the criminal investigator, it is your name that will appear at the bottom of the case files, so remember, “garbage in, garbage out.”

Edward William Wallace Jr.
Certified Senior Crime Scene Analyst,
NYPD First Grade Detective (Retired)



CSU Graduate Student Contributors

Charleston Southern University graduate students enrolled in the Master of Science in Criminal Justice program are responsible for the creativity of the case scenarios, development of the case files, preparation of the documentation, and presentation of the completed case files to colleagues for review. What started out as a graduate course assignment resulted in this newest textbook! Congratulations to every student for your perseverance and determination to earn your graduate degrees!

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Preface

WIFM—what does that mean? Are they radio or television station call letters? Is it an abbreviation for a federal agency or a military acronym? Would you believe these letters stand for something you ask yourself every day: What's In it For Me? No matter what decision you are about to make, you inevitably weigh the outcome by asking, "What's in it for me?" You considered that question when deciding whether or not to take this class, and this textbook is the simple answer to that question. Students identified a need for a step-by-step manual as they seek to enhance their job performance as investigators.

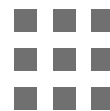
Each chapter of this book involves a different type of criminal offense. After reading the opening section of the case, you will assume the role of investigator. Read the case narrative, and then identify the steps you will take to conduct the investigation (investigative strategy) and the accompanying documentation that must be completed. What criminal offenses have occurred? What are the elements of the crime? As you review the narrative, create a chronological timeline. You will find this extremely useful as events unfold throughout the investigation, and you are the primary person responsible for making sure every step is identified and examined throughout the case.

This book was created by students for students, and it is designed to teach you how to successfully complete investigative case files for criminal activities. Eighteen graduate students collaborated to create this collection of case studies. The events reflect criminal investigations that are conducted every day.

Small and large agencies alike create case files that eventually are reviewed for prosecutorial decisions. A variety of reports is available and an equal number of writing styles, required forms, standard operating procedures, and types of offenders exist. No two reports or files are the same. Every investigation is unique—and each of these case files is also quite different. However, every criminal investigation has commonalities, including chronological sequencing, constitutional guarantees, investigative strategies, and the capacity of the American criminal justice system to effectively identify the guilty and exonerate the innocent.

The criminal justice graduate students at Charleston Southern University offer you these case files to assist in your studies, provide valuable training experiences, and lead to justice being served.

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Digital Assets

Thank you for selecting Anderson Publishing's *Crime Scene Investigation Case Studies: Step by Step from the Crime Scene to the Courtroom*. To complement the learning experience, we have provided a number of online tools to accompany this edition. Two distinct packages of interactive digital assets are available: one for instructors and one for students.

Interactive resources can be accessed for free by registering at: www.routledge.com/cw/fish

For the Instructor

- **Test Bank** Compose, customize, and deliver exams using an online assessment package in a free Windows-based authoring tool that makes it easy to build tests using the unique multiple-choice and true or false questions created for *Crime Scene Investigation Case Studies*. What's more, this authoring tool allows you to export customized exams directly to Blackboard, WebCT, eCollege, Angel, and other leading systems. All test bank files are also conveniently offered in Word format.
- **PowerPoint Lecture Slides** Reinforce key topics with focused PowerPoint slides, which provide a perfect visual outline with which to augment your lecture. Each individual book chapter has its own dedicated slideshow.
- **Lesson Plans** Design your course around customized lesson plans. Each individual lesson plan acts as a separate syllabus containing a content synopsis, key terms, directions to supplementary websites, and more open-ended critical-thinking questions designed to spur class discussion. These lesson plans also delineate and connect chapter-based learning objectives to specific teaching resources, making it easy to catalog the resources at your disposal.

For the Student

- **Self-Assessment Question Bank** Enhance, review, and study sessions with the help of this online self-quizzing asset. Each question is presented in an interactive format that allows for immediate feedback.
- **Forms for Filling Out Reports**
- **Video Resources for Select Cases**
- **Image Bank** Full-color images of the photos in the book.

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Introduction

From the Scene of the Crime to the Desk of the Prosecutor

OBJECTIVE

This opening chapter introduces the methodologies of investigating and reporting criminal offenses beyond the initial response. It includes a sample case for illustrative purposes.

KEY TERMS

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| case file | investigation | opinions |
| chronological order | jargon | reports |
| complainant | linkage | solvability factors |
| <i>corpus delicti</i> | Locards Exchange Principle | suspect |
| credibility | <i>modus operandi</i> | victim |
| elements | narrative | |
| fact | objective | |

What You Will Learn

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Describe the differences between facts and opinions
- Explain the goals of an investigation
- Examine case narratives to determine investigative strategies
- Identify the elements of the crime under investigation
- Review case file documents for accuracy
- Recognize areas for improvement in case files

Introduction

Millions of words have been written in an effort to educate and train law enforcement personnel to become well-prepared police officers, show crime scene technicians how to process crime scenes, help law school students to complete bar examinations, and equip judges to

fairly administer justice in the courtroom. What is the single tie that binds all these phases of the criminal justice system together? Investigative case files. First responders deal with emergency situations, and then they must begin the paperwork process that may cross dozens of desks and linger in the courts for many years. That initial preliminary investigation sets in motion a comprehensive course of action culminating in the completion of the inquiry process that may not end for decades. As with all systems, a strategy must be in place to guide the development of the investigation.

Poor police reporting can jeopardize effective criminal prosecution. Who is going to read your reports and case files? There is a wide spectrum of people contained in this audience, and first to view the report is your supervisor. Once the report is approved and becomes an official record, the list of readers expands: lawyers, prosecutors, judges, jurors, social workers, government officials, insurance adjusters and investigators, citizens, defendants, media representatives, crime lab analysts, and other investigating agencies. Is your work of sufficient quality to withstand all this scrutiny? Did you verify the information contained in the reports and subsequent forms? Can a person who is not familiar with investigative techniques read your report and develop a clear understanding of the events that have been documented?

This publication has been compiled to assist investigators and students in the various methodologies required to construct solid, factual investigative case files. These very different cases are presented for review, along with the required paperwork and an informative narrative that will provide details not apparent in the traditional reporting format. These types of investigations are conducted every day in agencies of every size across the United States and throughout the world. There is no “one size fits all” approach to acquiring the knowledge and skills that are required for successful case prosecution. We present the scenarios and the forms; you develop the timeline and the investigative strategy for completing the case file.

Investigation is successful when all the gaps are filled between the statements, alternative explanations are considered but then eliminated, and a solid prosecutable case file is presented to the state’s attorney for review. Not all investigations will result in arrests. Not all arrests will result in prosecutions. Certainly not all prosecutions will produce a conviction. The goal is to achieve justice. Were guilty perpetrators identified and prosecuted? Equally important, were the innocent exonerated and not wrongfully prosecuted?

Overview

In the United States, more than 16,000 law enforcement agencies generate reports on a daily basis. Since 1838 when the Boston Police Department became the first official police agency in the United States, crime and offense reports have been written. After more than 170 years of compiling reports, there is still no uniform or consistent method of collecting information when officers are called to provide assistance and begin an investigation. Most law enforcement agencies have now moved to the use of standardized reports, but no matter how far technology advances, there will always be reporting requirements for law enforcement functions.

There are not many proficient criminal investigators available for hire by police agencies. The diverse skills that must be developed and honed for one to become a highly effective

detective consume years of service and require a commitment, both of which are necessary to produce a high-quality, documented case file that accurately reflects every aspect of a case. Depending on the circumstances of the event, a few routine forms may need to be completed. Every action taken must be recorded. If a crime has been committed, the appropriate response actions will be initiated. Most actions taken by police officers and other first responders do not, in fact, involve criminal activity.

Regardless of whether the reports are completed on a keyboard or with an ink pen, the content must be complete, clear, concise, and accurate. Sometimes it is not possible or practical to type a report. We all have an idea of what an offense or accident report looks like—you can view various formats from different agencies online.

Investigative Case Files

Our focus is on the investigative **case file**, which contains all the documentation compiled by investigators who are examining every aspect of the event to determine the truth—what happened and who is responsible for that activity. Was a crime committed? What activities will be necessary to properly evaluate the circumstances and determine whether or not to proceed with a full investigation?

In this technologically advanced era of computers, digital images, and cloud storage, it is becoming more and more difficult to envision an investigative case file. Yet it is essential

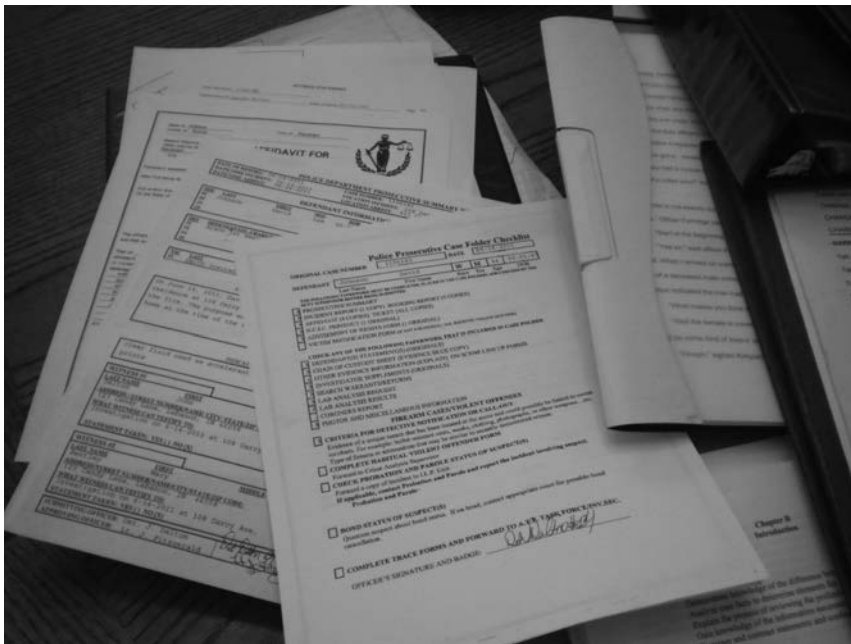


FIGURE 1-1 Many forms and documents are required for case files.

that all activities are documented so that any authorized individual reviewing the associated records will arrive at an informed decision regarding the investigation.

Terminology Used Throughout the Book

What is the definition of a report? **Reports** are permanent records of all important facts in a case. We need to examine this statement. Just what exactly is a fact? Look around the room now, examine an object, and then state a fact related to that object. For example, the highlighter I use when I am studying is yellow. Would you agree? How would you know this is a fact? The definition of a **fact** is simple: it is a statement that can be proven. When you read that statement, a picture formed in your mind of a yellow highlighter. Would you call that a preconceived notion because you are familiar with yellow highlighters? How do you know whether my highlighter has the diameter of a pen or a magic marker? How do you visualize yellow? Was it fluorescent or banana yellow? Was the cap chewed on? Why does it matter?

This exercise demonstrates the limited knowledge of an individual who was not at the scene and does not have first-hand knowledge with the events contained in the police report. The activities and observations recorded in an official report must be accurate and all information must be reported. Although it seems entirely petty to record such detail as the brand and style of the highlighter, at some point that type of precise information could become vital in creating a **linkage** or association among a victim, the crime scene, and a perpetrator. If you gain the skill of accurately conveying the totality of the information in every instance, your work will survive the scrutiny of a defense attorney in the courtroom.

You have no doubt completed many courses in criminal justice, from the historical beginnings to current-day Homeland Security issues. As students, you can probably list the steps that should be taken by an officer who observes criminal activity or who is dispatched to the scene of an event requiring police assistance. Can you clearly define an **investigation**? It is a systematic and detailed inquiry to determine the truth and let the facts prove or disprove allegations. It also involves seeking to identify those responsible for the events and to eliminate the innocent from suspicion. Finally, if a **corpus delicti** is established (evidence that a crime has been committed), a complete investigative file will present the best case possible for prosecution.

An investigator must establish **elements** of the crime, which are specific legal aspects of a criminal offense that must be proven. If a suspect is charged with the offense, all elements must be established beyond a reasonable doubt or there can be no finding of guilt. Determining the truth is more important than obtaining a conviction or closing a case. State statutes vary regarding the specific elements of offenses, but in every criminal proceeding, each specific condition must be identified for an act to be called a specific crime.

This case studies book consists of carefully structured learning experiences that place you in the role of an investigator who is conducting an investigation and completing the paperwork necessary to build a criminal case file. Although this book is by no means comprehensive,

it will provide you with a guide as you gain knowledge and skills in the “art” of writing. Remember, good writers can write about anything. A good investigator will establish **credibility** by remaining unbiased and impartial, and those traits will be reflected in your written work. Credibility is hard to establish and easy to lose.

Not all crimes are solvable. Many cases have insufficient evidence, no witnesses, and no informants to provide leads. In many instances, the responding officer will complete the initial report and an investigator will examine that report and determine the **solvability factors**—statements that are crucial to solving crimes and in prioritizing caseloads. The data are used for compiling statistics, and the victim (if insured) will provide a copy of the report for claim reimbursement; then the case is removed from active investigation.

The **narrative** section of the report is where the story is told. A well-structured narrative focuses on content and factual statements. Although incident and offense reports vary considerably in format, there is always a section where the officers record personal observations, document actions, and “tell the story.” There is never any room for your opinion in this type of report. Always use the first-person, past tense, active voice, and present the events in chronological order. Use short, clear, concise, and concrete words to explain the situation. **Jargon**, which consists of words, expressions, or phrases specific to a profession or occupation, can create confusion and cause delays or dismissals of criminal charges and should therefore not appear in the reports.

Detailed notes can make or break a case. Take notes on every step taken in every investigation. Ensure the information you record provides a complete and accurate depiction of the scene, the victims, the witnesses, the physical evidence, and the results of all analyses. You should always carry a personal notebook to write down complete, accurate, specific, and factual information. Remember, your opinion has no place in the reports. **Opinions** are beliefs that may not be accurate and may not be provable, whereas facts are tangible things used to make solid decisions and that can be proven. Your job is to provide case files that are **objective**—that is, the documents and statements display no bias, are non-opinionated, fair, and impartial.

As an investigator, you will establish a timeline—or sequence of the events. This timeline will assist you as you complete all of the paperwork following the **chronological order** of the incident. The importance and accuracy of the sequence can be used to establish the whereabouts of suspects, witnesses, weapons, and subsequent activities in relation to the victim. In fact, to proceed with an investigation, one of the primary responsibilities of law enforcement officers is to establish the **corpus delicti**, or “the body of the crime.” This does not literally mean that a body must be discovered, but it must be proven that someone has committed an offense. For example, if a purse with identification and personal items is found discarded alongside a highway, would you agree that it is the *corpus delicti*? With the discovery of the purse, it has not been proven that a crime occurred, so the answer is no. What does it take to make the purse the *corpus delicti*? First, it has to be proven that the property has been stolen and that a person is criminally responsible for this activity. If it cannot be established that the purse was stolen, then no crime has occurred.

CHRONOLOGICAL TIMELINE

| | |
|------|---|
| 0735 | Call received at 911 |
| 0735 | Call dispatched to patrol officer |
| 0741 | First officer arrived on scene (Duncan) |
| 0742 | Fire department on scene |
| 0743 | Backup officer arrives on scene |
| 0744 | Perimeter established |
| 0746 | Supervisors notified |
| 0748 | Investigator dispatched to scene (Humphrey) |
| 0750 | Crime scene investigator (CSI) dispatched to scene (Reeves) |
| 0814 | CSI arrives on scene |
| 0820 | Investigator and CSI conduct scene walkthrough |
| 0850 | Coroner arrives on scene (Rhodes) |
| 0900 | Photographs completed and sketches started |
| 0903 | Patrol supervisor arrives on scene (Potter) |
| 0911 | Backup officer begins neighborhood canvas to locate potential witnesses |
| 1110 | CSI completes diagram, photos, evidence collection |
| 1115 | Witness list provided to investigator; canvas is completed |
| 1210 | Coroner releases body to be removed from scene |
| 1320 | Patrol and CSI debrief with investigator |
| 1330 | Patrol and CSI clear scene |
| 1405 | CSI checks physical evidence in to Evidence/Property Unit |
| 1415 | Investigator begins interviewing neighborhood witnesses |
| 1600 | CSI reports to morgue to brief medical examiner and witness autopsy |

To be continued throughout the investigation.

The Purpose of This Book

Each chapter of this book involves a different type of criminal offense. After reading the opening section of the case, you will assume the role of investigator. Read the case narrative and then identify the steps you will take to conduct the investigation (your investigative strategy) and the accompanying documentation that must be completed. What criminal offenses have occurred? What are the elements of the crime? As you review the narrative, create a timeline. You will find this extremely useful as events unfold throughout the investigation and you are the primary person responsible for making sure every step is identified and examined throughout the case.

PRIMARY GOALS OF AN INVESTIGATION

The primary goals of an investigation are to discover the truth by determining whether or not a crime was committed, identifying those responsible, eliminating the innocent from suspicion, legally obtaining information, and compiling the best possible information for prosecutorial purposes. An investigator must be able to interview and write reports and must be thoroughly familiar with crimes and their elements. Although state and federal statutes vary, each crime has elements that must be established throughout the investigation.

Important Information for Every Investigation

No two cases are alike. Even if you identify a serial offender who continually commits the same offense, the circumstances always vary. For example, a burglar who always targets households in the daytime and enters through the backdoor has established a *modus operandi*, a method of operation, but every house is different, and each victim deserves an investigation. Who are the victims? **Victims** can be individuals, groups of people, or corporations. They can be young, elderly, physically or mentally challenged, or you.

Do you know anyone who has been the victim of a crime? Think back on the incident; now that you know there must be a *corpus delicti* for a crime to have occurred, did a criminal offense really take place? What factors were present that meet the parameters for the event to be classified as a crime? Were the perpetrators identified? Were criminal charges placed against them? How do you know whose actions constituted the commission of a crime—or the identity of the perpetrator? Did witnesses identify the subjects? A **complainant** is the person who reports an incident to the law enforcement agency responsible for responding to that specific jurisdiction. The complainant may or may not be a victim of a crime. Think of an example where a complainant is not a victim of the criminal offense that has been committed. A common occurrence would be a robbery of a bank or business during the daytime hours. In these circumstances, the complainant may be someone who drives by a store, observes a robbery taking place, then calls the police on a cell phone. This complainant is not a victim. In this situation, there may be multiple victims, including the store employee who is being robbed as well as any customers who are in the store at the time.

Look closely at the definition of a crime in your specific state statutes. Actions that are in violation of local ordinances, state statutes, and federal laws are criminal acts. How do you define the elements of a criminal offense? They are clearly identified in the state statutes. Will the prosecutor check your work to ensure you have established the *corpus delicti*? Absolutely, so material evidence and objective proof must clearly be included in the reports and statements contained within the case file.

DESCRIPTOR INFORMATION FOR EVERY SUSPECT

Collect as much data as possible, including the following:

| | |
|---------|-------------------------------|
| Name | Complexion |
| Alias | Speech/voice |
| Address | Abnormalities |
| Sex | Mustache or other facial hair |
| Race | Chin |
| Hair | Hands |
| Eyes | Posture |
| Height | Type of clothing |
| Weight | Scars/marks/tattoos |
| Age | Teeth |
| Build | |

What makes a person a **suspect**? First, you must know what constitutes a crime and how to establish it in writing. Proof that a crime has occurred must be established as the first step. A conviction is one of the final steps and cannot occur if reports are faulty or there is no investigative strategy that culminates in an arrest. Your investigation should identify a person or persons who appear to be directly or indirectly connected with the crime. Not everyone you encounter in the investigation will be a suspect, so remain unbiased and nonjudgmental.

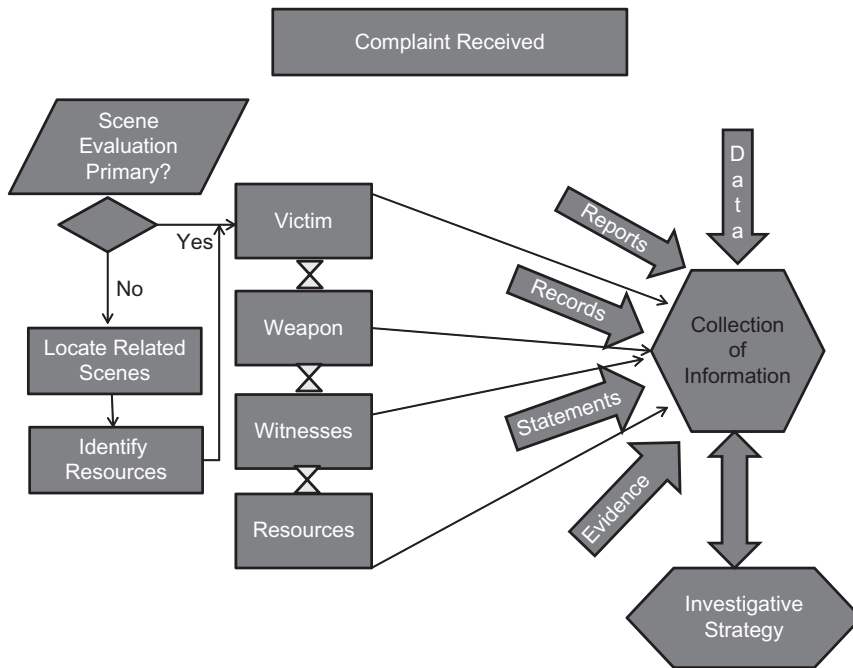


FIGURE 1-2 Investigative decision tree.

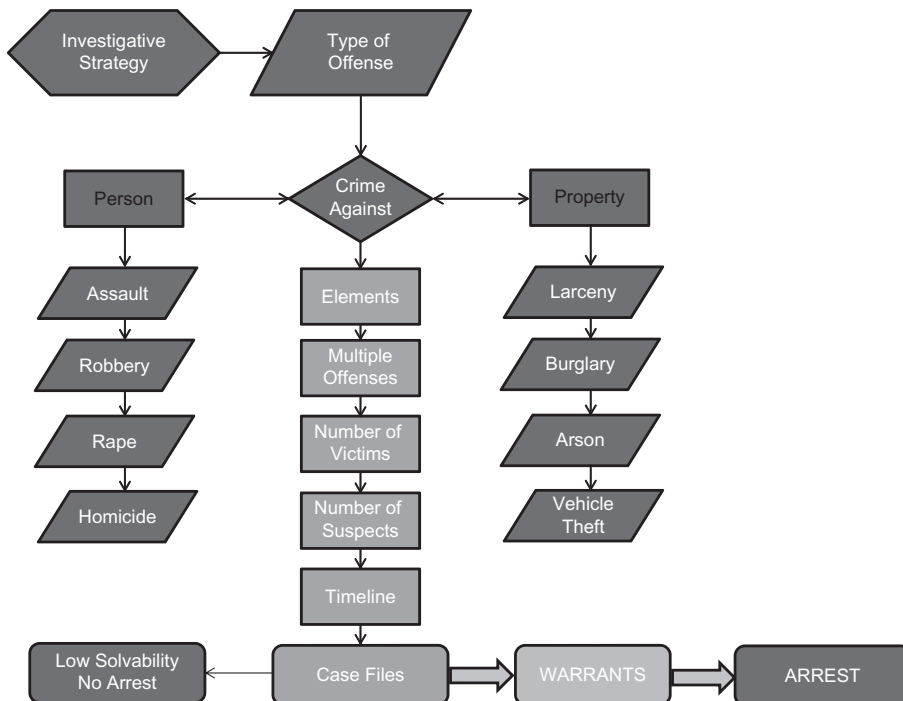


FIGURE 1-3 Investigative decision tree.

Review of Basic Crime Scene Investigation

Edmond **Locard’s exchange principle** makes criminal investigation a reality. Locard’s theory basically states that every contact leaves a trace. Therefore, when a perpetrator enters a crime scene or interacts with a victim, the perpetrator leaves something at the scene and takes something away—that is, there is an exchange of physical evidence. As you become familiar with the case files, you should be able to identify types of physical evidence that must be documented, collected, and preserved. Investigators must work closely with crime scene investigators (CSIs) as they process the crime scene or the victim. The case files will contain some lists of evidence and show reports of scientific analyses that were performed on the items. But are all the items documented, collected, and sent to the proper facilities for processing?

Moving Forward into the Case Files

| ELEMENTS OF A CASE FILE | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incident or offense report• Supplemental report(s)• Victim or witness statement(s)• Entry/exit log• Photo log• Crime scene rough sketch• Crime scene final sketch• Evidence/property sheet• Chain of custody log• Investigative strategy• Timeline• Miranda rights waiver• Field interview card• Affidavit for search warrant | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Search warrant• Affidavit for arrest warrant• Arrest warrant• Suspect statement• Consent to search waiver• Request for crime laboratory examination• Crime laboratory analysis report• Polygraph examination report• Autopsy report• Arson investigation report• Photo lineup form• Vehicle inventory/tow sheet• Arrest report• Booking sheet |

Now that you have completed your briefing for the content of this book, we are ready to move forward. The book contains case files of commonly encountered types of crimes. Accompanying each case is a narrative that will assist you as you review the seemingly endless array of police reports that must be completed for every investigation. As you read the case, documentation will be provided so that you can see how witness statements and investigations are intertwined and become part of a case file. This collection of documents begins with the first responding officer and concludes with a court trial if it is established that a crime occurred and that the suspect identified probably committed the alleged offenses. The cases you are reviewing were developed by a group of graduate students studying criminal justice at Charleston Southern University. The documentation, including photographs, crime scene

sketches, statements, search warrants, lineups, and so on, were identified as necessary in order to build a case file that could be presented to the prosecutor's office to press charges on behalf of the state.

After you have carefully reviewed a narrative and the case file, you will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the investigation. Again, this is the time when constructing a timeline of events will help to determine if additional steps are necessary or if documents are missing that need to be evaluated in order to close the investigation.

When you have completed each of the chapters, it becomes your turn. The final chapter will set up a case for you and provide the necessary information. You will have to establish a strategy for managing the case as well as determining which of the forms are necessary for your case file. The blank forms are provided for you to download and complete based on the information you have learned from this course. It is also your responsibility to generate a case narrative and a timeline to ensure you have identified all the steps necessary to take this investigation from the crime scene to the courtroom.

Sample Case

Critical Questions and Activities

1. Review the case narrative, and construct a timeline.
2. Familiarize yourself with the forms and reports contained within the case file.
3. List the elements of each of the crimes contained in the case file.
4. It is possible that not all physical evidence was collected/processed. Create a list of additional physical evidence you believe should have been collected and what type of scientific testing you would request from the crime lab.
5. Explain the key investigative strategies, and describe how you as the case investigator would address those problem areas in this case file.

CSI Officer Roberts was called to respond to a street address adjacent to a location where firefighters were extinguishing a house fire. The reporting officer, Lonnie Downs, had spotted a pool of blood in the street in front of the residence; the residence was on fire, but no victims had been located. The amount of blood in the street indicated a victim should be found suffering from a severe loss of blood. While Officer Downs began canvassing the neighborhood and knocking on doors, CSI Officer Roberts took photographs and created a crime scene diagram. Having just completed bloodstain pattern analysis training last month, Officer Downs knew how to use string to map out the path of the blood droplets and determine where the indicators converge. This might identify whether the victim was standing or sitting as the blood droplets were falling. The measurements indicated that the point of impact was the front bumper of the fire engine. Officer Downs questioned the fire truck engineer, who stated he had not seen anyone around the area when they arrived on the scene in response to the fire call. The entire squad deployed immediately and did not treat any patients. Both a fire supervisor and a police supervisor were summoned to the scene.

Already, several reports must be completed. Which ones have you identified, and who will be completing those reports?

When the fire trucks were ready to clear the scene, the lead fire truck was pulled back to depart. A body was discovered underneath the truck. So now it is a good thing the CSI had already completed his initial investigation by taking photos and mapping the blood spatter.

Apparently the victim was struck by the lead fire truck and had crawled back under the vehicle where he later expired. This is an excellent example of well-trained officers beginning to document actions before it is ever determined that a crime was committed. CSI Roberts had photographs, a sketch, and a stringing diagram of the crime scene. Officer Downs had already begun to complete the preliminary investigation report and had identified all the first responders on the scene. It was, however, impossible to get a statement from anyone else. They were too busy laughing. The victim was an opossum.

Not all investigations are going to lead to criminal prosecutions. This is a good example; however, keep in mind that you may not know the outcome of an event or incident for many years. That doesn't mean that shortcuts are taken or required paperwork is not completed because in your opinion, no crime has occurred. Police officers encounter unexpected outcomes throughout their careers. What appears to be a clear-cut suicide may actually be a well-staged homicide. There is no room for second guessing or taking shortcuts when conducting an investigation and building a case file.

What are the positive outcomes of this scenario? Was due diligence undertaken until a resolution occurred? Sometimes you will discover no crime was committed; however, every investigation demands that protocols and standard operational procedures be completed.

And Finally

Many famous instructors and detectives know the key to success is to allow the evidence to speak for itself. An investigator does a thorough and ethical investigation and then hands that case file over to the prosecutorial branch of the American criminal justice system. Criminalist Paul Kirk penned these words back in 1953, and they are still so relevant today:

However careful a criminal may be to avoid being seen or heard, he will inevitably defeat his purpose unless he can also control his every act and movement so as to prevent mutual contamination with his environment, which may serve to identify him. . . . Wherever he steps, whatever he touches, whatever he leaves—even unconsciously—will serve as silent evidence against him. Not only his fingerprints and his shoeprints, but also his hair, the fibers from this clothes, the glass he breaks, the tool mark he leaves, the paint he scratches, the blood or semen that he deposits or collects—all these and more bear mute witness against him. . . . Physical evidence cannot be wrong; it cannot perjure itself; it cannot be wholly absent. Only in its interpretation can there be error. Only human failure to find, study, and understand it can diminish its value.

Kirk P. (1953), Crime investigation. New York: Interscience.