

East Tennessee State University
Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology

Forensic Handwriting Identification CJCR 5120

Course Syllabus

Contact Information

Instructor: Heidi H. Harralson, MA, BCDE, Dipl.
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The preferred contact method is via email. I have two email addresses and I prefer if you use spectrum008@aol.com as I read that email almost daily. I review my ETSU email account less frequently. If you need to arrange a telephonic call, please schedule a time and contact number via email first.

Format

This course is conducted 100% online. Materials will be posted to the Desire2Learn (D2L) forum. Weekly reading assignments and discussion questions will be provided in D2L.

Textbooks

Harralson, H. H. & Miller, L. S. (2018). *Huber and Headrick's handwriting examination: Facts and fundamentals*, second edition. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. ISBN: 9781498751308

Harralson, H. H. (2013). *Developments in handwriting and signature identification in the digital age*. Waltham, MA: Anderson. ISBN: 978-1-4557-3147-3.

Learning Outcomes & Course Objectives

This course is intended to acquaint the student with the fundamentals of forensic handwriting examination and identification:

Goals include:

- Familiarize students with the fundamentals of handwriting identification, including terminology, theoretical principles, and historical background of the field.

- Students learn to conduct a forensic handwriting identification investigation through 1) analysis of handwritten materials, 2) comparison and differentiation of class and individual characteristics, and 3) evaluation of fundamental and significant similarities and differences as well as limiting factors.
- Students learn how to apply methodological standards and formulate forensic opinions.
- Students understand ethical issues, current research, and case law pertaining to handwriting identification.

Assessment

Your progress in this class will be assessed through a combination of practical exercises, proficiency tests, reading and reaction discussions, and a document examination paper/project. There are 100 possible points in this course.

Practical Exercises (5)	20%	20 points
Proficiency Tests (4)	40%	40 points
Final Paper/Project	20%	20 points
Participation	20%	20 points

The following grading scale is used in this course:

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	70-76
F	Below 70

Assignments

Practical Exercises: There are five practical handwriting examination exercises in this course. Instructions regarding the practical exercises will be posted by the instructor in the News section before they are due. The exercises are designed to reinforce material learned in the lectures. The practical exercises are cumulatively worth 25 points.

Proficiency Tests: There are four proficiency tests that will be assigned in this course. These tests help the student to apply practical skills in studying handwriting identification. The student will be presented with varying scenarios involving the examination and comparison of handwriting and signatures in order to test pattern recognition skills, apply methodological

analysis, use opinion terminology, and support opinions. The four tests are cumulatively worth 40 points.

Final Research Paper: The final paper topic is on forensic handwriting identification research. You can take one of two approaches with your paper: 1) a review of the research that has been conducted to support handwriting identification methods and theory including a review and commentary of the research that is still needed in the field; or 2) a research experiment (including literature review, method, results, discussion/conclusion) on a specific handwriting identification topic (i.e., proficiency, bias, health conditions, disguise, technique, etc.). The paper needs to be double-spaced and include a minimum of 8 pages and a maximum of 15 pages in length (excluding cover page and reference page). The paper must include a minimum of five citations from scholarly sources (peer-reviewed journals or scholarly texts). The paper should be formatted in APA style with a cover page, reference page, and abstract. If the paper is not relevant to the subject matter of this class, preapproval of the subject needs to be cleared with the instructor. A document examination project, onsite training, or attendance at a forensic document examination conference may be substituted for the final paper upon prior approval by the instructor. Details about alternate projects will be discussed during the semester. The final paper/project is worth 20 points.

Discussion Questions: Cumulatively, discussions are worth 20 points. Discussions are expected to be meaningful, well-developed paragraphs in response to the discussion topic(s) posted by the instructor. The student needs to submit a minimum of three well-developed posts each week in order to earn maximum points.

Assignments can be submitted to the instructor through the “Dropbox” on D2L. If there are technical issues, I will allow submission of assignments via email but this method needs to be kept to a minimum. You may use MS Word or PDF for assignments. A letter grade will be deducted for each week that an assignment is submitted late.

Course Policies

Attendance & Participation

Students are expected to actively and regularly participate in online discussions every week. Participation is worth 20% of the overall grade and the participation grade will be posted at the end of the course. Online participation will include reactions to assigned reading materials and discussion of topics introduced by the instructor.

Academic Writing, Research, and Format

All formal papers are expected to be written in a formal, objective, and scholarly manner. Citations must come from academic sources (peer reviewed journals and academic texts). Use the ETSU online Sherrod Library link to find research citations.

All formal papers and citations must use the style published in the *Publication Manual of American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Referred to as APA style, it is widely used in the social sciences. In addition to the manual, there are several resources on the Internet about use of APA including:

<http://www.bibme.org/citation-guide/apa/>

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

All papers need to be formatted in 10 or 12 point using Times New Roman, Arial, or similar fonts. Papers should be double-spaced.

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

Copying text without credit to the source is considered plagiarism. All formal papers including case reports are to cite material using APA style. While responses to discussion questions do not need to cite materials in as formal a format, plagiarism is not tolerated on the discussion forum. Summaries of reading material need to be written in the student's own words. If quoting material on the discussion forum, the source needs to be cited. Copying or paraphrasing the posts of other students is considered cheating and will not be tolerated on the discussion forum. Duplicate work used between classes (e.g., turning in the same or similar paper or post in more than one class) is not accepted.

If any student is caught cheating or plagiarizing on any part of the course requirements, that student may be given an F for that particular assignment or for the entire course, at the discretion of the instructor. Any student caught cheating or plagiarizing may also be reported to the Dean.

Schedule

The following schedule of weekly topics and/or assignments is tentative and subject to change.

Date	Topic
Week 1	Introduction to class
Week 2	Scope of Work and Standards; Forensic Bias
Week 3	Handwriting Motor Movement; Practical Exercise 1
Week 4	Practical Exercise 2
Week 5	Proficiency Test 1
Week 6	Practical Exercise 3 - Checklist
Week 7	Fall Break
Week 8	Proficiency Test 2
Week 9	Practical Exercise 4 – Influencing Factors
Week 10	Proficiency Test 3
Week 11	Practical Exercise 5 - Fatigue
Week 12	Proficiency Test 4
Week 13	Final Paper/Project
Week 14	Thanksgiving Break
Week 15	Final Paper/Project
Week 16	Final Grading