

## Module 2

### Handwriting sample presentation and contamination

#### Overview

*At this stage the examiner has been presented with at least two samples of writings. Normally these samples are in the form of 'Specimens' (where the writing is directly attributable to a particular individual) or 'Questioned' (where the authorship is either unknown or disputed). Ultimately the comparison of this material aims to determine whether there may be a nexus between the samples by writer. One of the most critical aspects of a comparison is the internal validity of each of the comparison samples as it is important from the outset that only one writer is represented by this sample.*

*Comparison samples that are submitted as specimen writings are either in the form of requested specimens or collected specimens. Since requested handwriting is witnessed it is assumed to have been written by the nominated person. Collected handwriting is however subject to a level of contamination by more than one writer. Although it is not the task of the FDE to prove the validity of the specimen material, writings are always assessed to determine whether there is any evidence of more than one writer having been responsible for the entries. Spurious entries in the minority are excluded from the comparison process.*

#### Procedure

At this stage of the method the handwriting has been separated into sample groups. These groups may comprise either specimen or questioned handwriting. In most circumstances the examiner will be comparing specimen to questioned handwriting. It is the case that questioned samples can also be compared to other questioned samples. This approach is taken when either the specimens cannot be proved directly or where specimen writing is unavailable and the issue under investigation is whether one or more writers wrote series of entries or on a number of different documents. For the purposes of the general discussion the samples that are to be compared to the questioned sample will be referred to as 'comparison samples'.

The questioned material is set aside and a preliminary intra-comparison is conducted on the comparison sample(s). This examination is a modified form of the steps shown on the flow diagram of Module 1. The aim of this preliminary examination is to determine whether there is any indication that the comparison samples may contain writings from more than one individual.

A comparison sample document containing a quantity of handwriting that can establish features that the examiner believes characterize this writer is selected. This sample is used to compare with the other comparison sample documents. A preliminary examination of the material can reveal whether or not the writings are similar when an inter-sample comparison is conducted. The importance of this preliminary examination is discussed in the general texts on the subject (Harrison, 1958; Hilton, 1982; Ellen, 1989; Risinger, 1989).

Any inconsistencies observed in the comparison sample handwritings are referred to by the authors as 'potential contamination'. The type of characteristic considered as a dissimilarity, is covered in detail in Modules 6 and 7. The treatment of handwriting as potential contamination of comparison sample material, may result from any of the following realities:

- The comparison sample entries have been written by more than one writer.
- The comparison sample writer may have more than one style of handwriting (excluding dissimilarities that invariably result from uppercase, lowercase and cursive formats of writing).
- The comparison sample entries may have been generated at significantly different times, using various writing implements. This may result in material that the examiner considers too unreliable for inclusion.

### **Excluding spurious entries**

Should the examiner have any doubts as to the reliability of spurious entries (which appear in minority) then those entries are excluded from the sample group. When a significant quantity of potential contamination is detected the examiner should contact the investigator to clarify the proof of authorship of the sample material.

Collected specimen documents such as an address book or a diary frequently contain entries by more than one writer. The small quantity of discrete writing events that may appear on the pages of these documents can make it difficult to determine whether or not all of the entries are by a single writer. The entries may be limited to such an extent that the whole specimen document is excluded due to its unsuitable or unreliable nature (see Figure 2.1). In general, inconsistent entries that may be attributed to another writer, overwritten entries and obliterated entries are excluded from the examination.

At the end of this process the FDE will have arrived at two or more distinct samples for comparison (either questioned or comparison sample) where for each least one of the samples, the examiner is confident that it represents the writings of only one individual.

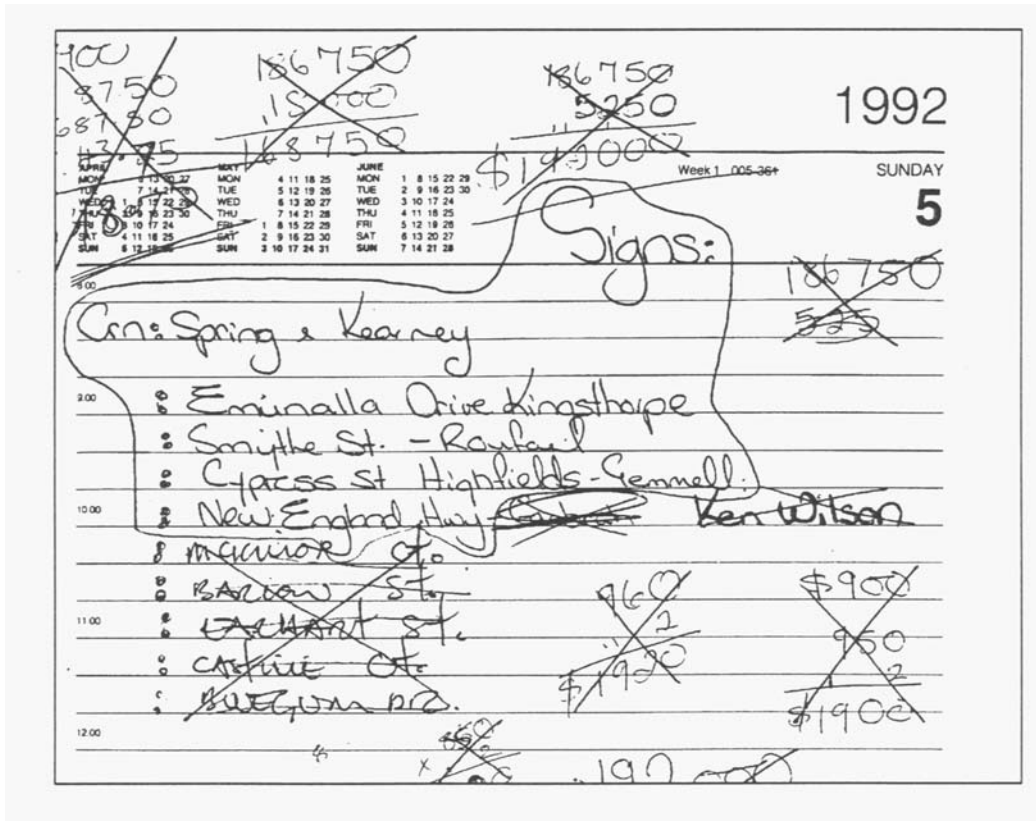


Figure 2.1 Spurious entries excluded from a page in a Diary.

