Chapter 1  *Observation Skills*

**CATALYST (LEFT HAND SIDE)**

- *Take out your three questions from last night’s reading!*
- When you walked onto the second floor of this classroom, how many steps did you climb?
- What color was the bumper sticker on the bookshelf when you walked into the room? What did it say?
- How many people have on dark colored shirts in the classroom?
Chapter 1  Observation Skills

REMINDERS

- Homework for tonight: Watch NBC tonight at either 7:30PM, 8:30PM, or 9:30PM for 5 minutes. Write down as many observations as you can from those 5 minutes.
Chapter 1  Observation Skills

AGENDA

- Intuitive Investigators
- Observations / Factors Affecting Observation
- Activity 1-1
Chapter 1 **Observation Skills**

By the end of this chapter you will be able to:

- define observation and describe what changes occur in the brain
- describe examples of factors influencing eyewitness accounts of events
- compare the reliability of eyewitness testimony with what actually happened
- relate observation skills to their use in forensic science
- define forensic science
- practice and improve your observation skills
1. The forensic examiner must be able to find—identify the evidence.

2. The forensic examiner must be able to document—record the evidence.

3. The forensic examiner must be able to interpret—accurately determine the significance of the evidence.
What Is Observation?

Our brains can filter out information.

Point out some of the details in this photo.
Our brains fill in gaps in our perception.

- In order to make sense of what we perceive, our brains often enrich with detail what we see, taste, hear, smell, or feel.

- After an event, we can believe things were part of the background even though they were not.
What Is Observation?

Our brains apply previous knowledge to new situations.

What assumptions can you make about this scene? How might those assumptions be wrong?
Observations by Witnesses

are affected by:

- their emotional states.
- whether they were alone, part of a group, or whether others were in the area.
- what type of and how much activity was going on around them.
Eyewitness Accounts

- Reports from individuals about crime-scene events often vary.
- Observations depend on the level of interest, stress, concentration, and the amount and kind of distractions present.
- Prejudices, personal beliefs, motives, and any lapse in time since the occurrence can also have an affect.
The Innocence Project

- Barry C. Scheck and Peter J. Neufeld at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, starting in 1992, use DNA to examine post-conviction cases.

- The project has found that up to 87% of the wrongful convictions they discovered were due to faulty eyewitness identifications.
How to be a Good Observer

Observe systematically—

- Start at one part of a crime scene and run your eyes slowly over every space.
- Slowly look at every part of a piece of evidence.
- Do not assume that later on you will be able to remember everything.
How to be a Good Observer

Turn off filters—

- Do not pay attention to only what you think is important.
- On a crime scene you will not know what will turn out to be important.
- Make a conscious effort to pay attention to all the details in your surroundings.
Leave the final interpretation of data until later—

- Do look for patterns and make connections.
- But the more information obtained, the better will be the interpretations.
- Remember that eyewitness accounts and your own thinking can include prejudices.
How to be a Good Observer

Documentation, documentation, documentation—

- It is important to write down and photograph as much information as possible.
- Keep in mind that memory is faulty.
- Remember that our brains tend to automatically fill in gaps in our perceptions.
Observations in Forensics

- Study situations.
- Find clues in ordinary details.
- Work backwards from the evidence to what led up to the crime.
- Be patient.
- Practice.
The environment and our natural sensory filters affect our ability to observe. Eyewitness reports can be faulty. Gaining good observation skills is possible. Forensic scientists find, document, and accurately interpret the evidence.
Activity 1-1

Objectives:

*By the end of this activity, you will be able to:*

1. Describe some of the problems in making good observations.
2. Improve your observational skills.
Activity 1-1

- You will have 20 seconds to look at a picture and study it.
- When time up, I will ask you several questions about the picture.
- You will have 4 minutes to copy the questions and answer them in your notebook.
READY?
Questions

1. At what location was the photograph taken?
2. How many cars are pictured?
3. What color are the cars?
4. What types of offices are located in the building?
5. How many small trees are in the picture?
6. The photograph was taken in New York State during which season?
7. How many people are in the photograph?
READY?
PICTURE 2
Questions

1. What is pictured in Photograph 2?
2. Describe the shape of the object pictured.
3. What are the colors of the object?
4. What color edged the top of the object?
5. Upon what is the object displayed?
6. Describe or sketch the design on the object.
7. What is the approximate size of the object?
Questions

1. How many people are in Photograph 3?
2. What is the sex of the person in the picture?
3. What is the approximate age of the person in the photograph?
4. What color is the person’s hair?
5. Does the person have long hair or short hair?
6. Does the person have any distinguishing features? Glasses?
7. Can you describe the person’s clothing?
8. Can you describe where the picture was taken?
9. Based on evidence in the photograph, can you form a hypothesis about the person’s occupation?
10. Is it possible to identify the interests of the person based on evidence in the room?
Discussion Questions

1. Did everyone answer all of the questions correctly?

2. If everyone viewed the same photograph, what are some possible reasons why answers differed.
Discussion Questions

3. Do you think it is easier to answer questions about a photograph if a person is in the picture? Why or why not?

4. Did your ability to see more detail and answer more questions correctly improve with practice?
5. Thinking about the characteristics of good observers, do you consider yourself a good observer? Why or why not?
REMINDERS

- Homework for tonight: Watch NBC tonight at either 7:30PM, 8:30PM, or 9:30PM for 5 minutes. Write down AS many observations as you can from those 5 minutes.