

INVESTIGATIVE TIPS & TECHNIQUES:

Helping to Tell the Story

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Is it necessary to be constantly taking photographs or digital images on many of the cases we respond to? Whether its motor vehicle accidents, injuries, death investigations, arsons, impression evidence, etc., some argue we are wasting our time and over documenting things that can be easily articulated. I don't know about you, but most people have difficulty articulating enough detail in their descriptions to enable the reader to picture the item in their head. The other factor is the lack of time available between calls to organize your thoughts enough to explain the event(s) accurately.

Images are taken not only to "tell the story", but to document, preserve, and provide visual forensic examination and for visual aids in court presentations. Some of the most valuable items I use that are extremely versatile with very minimal costs, are Business Card Scales and Arrow Scales. I learned this several years ago from Mr. Richard Worthington, when he was conducting a presentation for the Lynn Peavey Company.

Business Card and Arrow Scales use the metric scale, which is preferable for resizing forensic examination to a 1:1 ratio. I have used both for documenting developed latent prints, defects caused by projectiles, and injuries on both the living and deceased. The most overwhelming use has been for documenting injuries sustained in severe domestic violence investigations. In the past, when I would approach a female victim to hold a photographic ruler next to the contusions around her neck, she would withdraw and shake. I would then explain my intentions again and switch to using the Arrow Scales. At first I had her place the scales adjacent to the injuries I needed to document, which gave her a chance to relax. As we continued, she relaxed enough to allow me to place the scales on and around her neck at various locations, enabling me to correlate the contusions to the accounts of the actor's manual strangulation. To aid in "Helping to Tell the Story", the hypothenar, interdigital, and phalanges were clearly visible. In one case involving an open guilty plea to aggravated assault, the defendant and defense attorney were shown the images with little explanation. This allowed the victim to be spared from testifying and reliving the accounts of the event.

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