

Handwriting Analysis: The Professional Investigator's Secret Weapon

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What if you could know a person inside-out before you met them? How much better could you interview someone if you understood their thinking style, social attitudes, ego needs, fears and defenses? Handwriting analysis can give you the vital edge you need in an investigation.

Child Custody Investigations

Imagine yourself confronted by the hysterical mother of a 7-year-old child who claims that her father forces her to shower with him on overnight visits, which have been ordered by the court. The woman wants you to investigate her ex-husband who has no criminal record, and whose employer gives him a stellar recommendation. How do you know if the ex-husband is showing his true face at work, or whether the wife is stretching the facts?

To round out your investigation, you could obtain a handwriting analysis, which may bring out what you need to know. Often, in such cases, a parent twists circumstances to suit his or her own ends. A handwriting professional (*graphologist* is the generic term for a handwriting analyst) would ask you to obtain not only samples of the ex-husband's handwriting, but also of the mother's. By having both parents' handwriting examined, it is possible to uncover their true motivations

and determine who is most likely acting in the child's best interests.

In the case described above, the father's handwriting showed strong potential for violence, poor impulse control, and sexual issues. But the mother's handwriting was also problematic, revealing a type of person who needs to be in control of everything and everyone, all the time—someone who needs to be at the center of attention. Her subjective outlook made it difficult for her to see things from another's point of view.

In addition to the handwritings of the parents, the graphologist made a request for the child to draw "...a picture of the family doing something." The girl's handwriting at age 7 was not mature enough to use by itself, but, with that simple instruction to draw something, important information was produced, which the graphologist was able to add to her findings. The handwriting analyst could draw conclusions from which parent(s) the child included in the drawing, where she placed them in relationship to herself on the page, and what activities she demonstrated the family doing. The graphologist's report was provided to the court to help the judge make a determination in the child's best interest.

How to "Read" the Handwriting

Can you see danger signs in handwriting?

Perhaps the most important principle in handwriting analysis is to understand that no one stroke or characteristic has any meaning outside the context of the handwriting as a whole. A "meaning" can change, depending on what else appears in the sample. Thus, a "t-bar" crossed near the top of the stem in a handwriting with strong pressure and good rhythm could mean that the person was ambitious and set their aspirations high. The same t-bar in a handwriting with weak pressure and poor rhythm might indicate that the writer has big dreams and would like to succeed, but doesn't have the energy to do so. This example shows why it is difficult to generalize. But having said that, let's look at some *broad* generalities.

One big red flag is found in extremes of pen pressure. A handwriting that is so heavy it nearly tears through the paper suggests a writer filled with frustration and anger—he's taking it out on the paper, so you can imagine how he would treat a human being. He's likely to be quite loud when he vents. If given a choice, he might use red ink.

Figure 1

At the other extreme is the writer whose pressure is so light that he barely leaves any ink on the page. His ink choice would be a light blue. You may be surprised to learn that the light-pressured writer has just as much anger and frustration as the heavy writer. What's

“...a graphologist can help private investigators in a wide range of areas, from determining who wrote a threatening anonymous note, to jury screening...”

the difference? He turns it in on himself, which results in depression. When this type of writer vents, the explosion, so to speak, can be far-reaching. The handwriting in Figure 1 is such a writer.

This sample is from a 34-year-old law enforcement officer who shot and killed his girlfriend and then took his own life. His handwriting has very light pressure. Several months before the murder/suicide, a graphologist had described his handwriting as having red flags for “potentially explosive behavior.”

This man had been depressed over his recent divorce, after which his ex-wife moved far away with their young daughter. He also had problems at work, and stress with his new girlfriend. In addition, the graphologist noted that some samples of his writing bore evidence of a head injury, which he confirmed, saying that he had been hit in the head so hard (on the job) that he was being treated for blinding headaches. Add his alcohol abuse to these ingredients, and we have a powder keg with a lighted match an inch away.

Figure 2

Figure 2 is the handwriting of Christine Falling, a woman in her 30s who killed several children for whom she babysat. Again, the handwriting has evidence of head injury (her mother hit Christine in the head with a board when she was a child, resulting in epilepsy). See the green arrows, which point to twisted upper loops. These loops suggest the “twisted thinking” of someone whose worldview doesn’t match that of the average person. The red arrows point to forms that appear to be “x’s” but are not. This is a form often made by someone with a strong “death consciousness.” Someone close to them may have died recently, or they are thinking of their own death. The blue arrows point to a fairly

common characteristic, which is the final stroke of a word that rises up and points back over the word. This is made by the writer who, on one hand feels the need to protect their ego, and on the other, draws attention to themselves. Christine Falling started her killing spree with her cousin’s child. Reportedly, she and the cousin had been close, and she believed the baby was interfering with their relationship. So, when left in the car with the baby while her cousin went into a store, Falling smothered the child. Five other children died at her hands before authorities charged her.

Falling has been serving a so-called life sentence, but will be eligible for parole in 2007. When asked what she would like to do when she got out, you can guess her answer: Babysit. “I just love kids to death.” Really.

Handwriting tells the truth. Regardless of how charming and kindly this killer babysitter came across, Falling’s handwriting could have told investiga-

tors what was really going on. A graphologist could not have predicted she would become a stone-cold killer, but her handwriting would have revealed the potential. It cannot predict with certainty what the writer will do — but it can clearly show serious personality problems. Children should not have been left in Falling’s care.

Other Uses

Beyond red flags for bad behavior, the services of a graphologist can help private investigators in a wide range of areas, from background investigations for employers to determining who wrote a threatening anonymous note, from jury screening to checking out a prospective surrogate mother or adopting parents.

Geoffrey Feiger, the attorney for Dr. Jack Kevorkian (known as “Dr. Death” to many) used the services of a graphologist to help him select the jury in the doctor’s five successful trials. Because personality type is clearly evident in handwriting, it’s not difficult for a professional to create a typology to suit the needs of a particular trial. For instance, if the attorney wants a strongly empathetic jury, rather than a more intellectual one, the graphologist will be looking for softer, rounded handwritings, not block-printed or linear ones (among other things).

Large companies who are particularly concerned about getting the best person for a high-level position often use handwriting analysis to help them choose

Figure 1

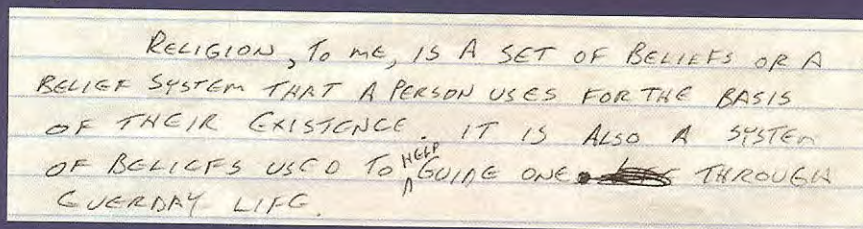
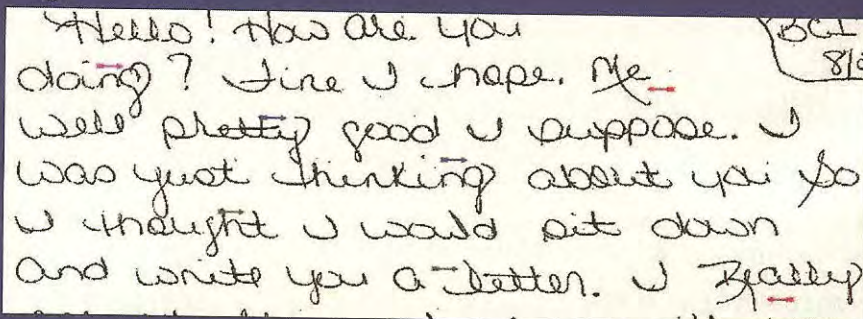


Figure 2



between candidates. Using a comprehensive job description as a guideline, the graphologist is able to compare the handwriting to the requirements and determine whether the two are a good match. It is not the graphologist's job to keep good people from being hired, but to help prevent their clients from making expensive hiring mistakes.

How do you find a good graphologist?

Unfortunately, handwriting analysis is an unlicensed profession, which means that anyone can pick up a book on the subject and a couple of days later call themselves a graphologist. Hundreds of web sites exist by people claiming to be handwriting experts, but a handsome web site is not enough on its own to support claims of being the "foremost handwriting expert in the country," as many do.

A few simple guidelines can help you make sure the graphologist you retain is all they claim to be. See the sidebar for some reputable non-profit educational organizations in the U.S. that can provide feedback about members and sometimes non-members — handwriting analysis is a very small community and tales of unethical behavior get around fast.

Any graphologist who claims to be able to tell you "everything" about a person from their handwriting, or says they can teach you handwriting analysis in ten minutes, should be viewed as no

better than a snake oil salesman. This is a profession like any other, requiring years of serious study before going into practice.

Ask the analyst for his or her curriculum vitae. It should contain proof of educational background in graphology and psychology, and plenty of experience in the field. Lectures given at professional conferences and papers published are a plus, as is continuing education. As in other fields, some handwriting analysts have been known to inflate their credentials, so it's wise to make a few inquiries for verification.

Another word of caution: The handwriting analysis report should be used as just one piece of the personality

puzzle, rather than relying solely on the findings of the graphologist. It should be added to interviews, testing, and other parts of the investigative process.

Whatever investigative area you specialize in, you can gain the competitive edge by obtaining the deepest possible understanding of those you deal with. Handwriting analysis can be one more tool in your investigative toolbox.

Sheila Lowe (sheilalowe.com) is a court-tested handwriting expert. State-approved to provide continuing education, she is the author of The Complete Idiot's Guide to Handwriting Analysis.

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For further research
on handwriting,
check out
these websites:

American Association of Handwriting Analysts - www.aaha-handwriting.org

American Handwriting Analysis Foundation - www.handwritingfoundation.org

American Society of Professional Graphologists - www.asps-handwriting.org

National Society for Graphology - www.nsforg.com

The Vanguard, a network of handwriting professionals - www.sheilalowe.com



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