



BASIC EVIDENCE PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography plays a vital role in recording crime scenes and evidence, serving as crucial elements for attorneys and courtroom presentations to bolster testimonies and substantiate or refute claims. Given their significance as court evidence, officers should aim to capture photographs that adhere to the standards necessary for admissibility in legal proceedings.

This training outline shall serve as a general guide for patrol officers composing basic and/or initial photographs of evidence and crime scenes on our college campuses. Any questions related to documenting evidence and/or crime scenes should be directed to the Property/Evidence supervisor.

CRIME SCENE FUNDAMENTALS

First and foremost, all crime scenes must first be secured prior to photographing to ensure preservation with minimal disturbance of the evidence. The boundaries should be set larger than initially anticipated and the area can later be reduced in size if needed. After securing a crime scene, a Crime Scene Log must be initiated and maintained. Only once a Crime Scene Log is established can officers and investigators begin assessing the scene, its evidence, and begin planning the photographs needed. Photographs must be taken of crime scenes and related evidence, as it lay in the scene, prior to any evidence collection.

When documenting a crime scene with photographs, a *minimum* of three (3) photos should be taken of each crime scene (see Figure 1):

1. Overview Photographs
 - Show the overall scene, including landmarks (e.g., street signs, building names, etc.). Overview photographs should enable readers to visualize the scene as you first saw it.
2. Mid-Range Photographs
 - Show the general area/location of the evidence.
3. Close-Up Photographs
 - Show the details of the evidence, including its positioning and any relevant details (e.g., scratches, blood, fingerprints, etc.).

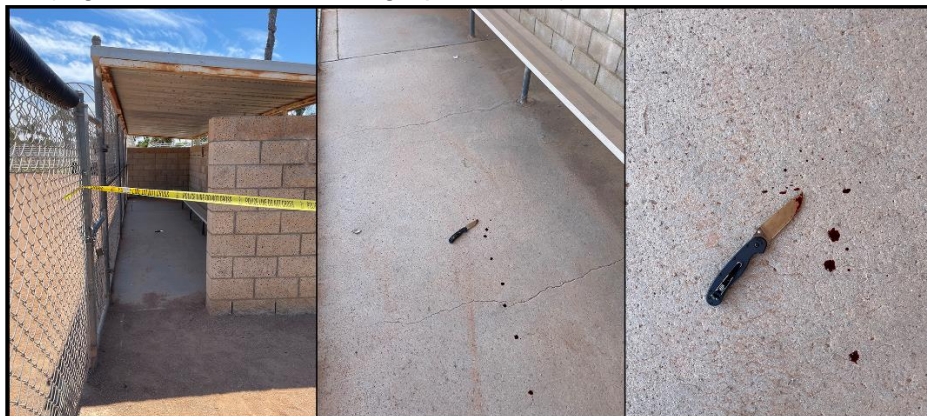


Figure 1. From left to right: overview photograph of crime scene, mid-range photograph of evidence item, close-up photograph of evidence item.



To photograph items laying in shadows, be sure to use the flash device to illuminate the shadow, including during daytime (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. In the mid-range photo on the left, a firearm sitting on the floorboard of a vehicle is obscured in the dark shadow. Using flash and exposure settings, the firearm can be seen easily in the photo on the right.

Do not let other officers/investigators appear in the photographs, including any police equipment that was not involved in the crime and/or incident. Be sure not to disturb or destroy any evidence during the photography process prior to evidence collection.



INDOOR CRIME SCENES

For crime scenes inside a building, first photograph the exterior of the building. Depending on the circumstances, all doors, windows, and other means of entrance/exit to the building should be photographed.

Interior overview photographs should consist of the following (see Figure 3):

1. Photographs of the entrance both from inside and outside the room/building.
2. Photograph a room as it first appears when you walk in.
3. Photograph the room in a series of photos "looking in" from each corner of the room.

Interior overview photographs can be taken with a wide-angle lens, so long as the images are not excessively distorted and have a good, accurate perspective.



Figure 3. Indoor evidence photos. From left-to-right, top-to-bottom: Exterior photo looking in, first-look inside, interior photo looking out, and photographs from the inside of each corner of the room.



USE OF SCALES

Scales and other measuring devices should be used in crime scene and evidence photography to aid in a variety of areas, including:

1. Orient the viewer to the photograph.
2. Showcase the relative size of an object.
3. Maintain a scale in the event a photograph is enlarged/magnified.
4. Determine the size at the time the incident occurred for something with a non-fixed size (e.g., wounds).

Scales are critical for photos of evidence items that may later become the basis for a comparison, such as wounds, footwear impressions, bullet holes, and fingerprints, among others. When using scales in photographs, two (2) photographs of each item of evidence must be taken: one photograph must be taken without the scale (to show what is underneath and that no evidence was blocked/hidden by a scale) and one with the scale (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. The photo on the left shows a shoe impression without a scale and the photo on the right shows the same impression with a scale. Both photos must be taken and submitted as evidence.



USE OF NUMBERING AND DIRECTIONAL MARKERS

Numbering markers must be used to identify similar but separate items in a scene (e.g., multiple bullet shell casings; see Figure 5). Numbering devices do not need to be used to identify items that cannot be confused with other items.

Directional markers may be placed in photographs to indicate a direction (e.g., north or “up”). Directional markers should be considered when photographing evidence where physical orientation is relevant, for example footwear impressions to show direction of travel (a marker would indicate north) or fingerprints to show how an item was touched (a marker would indicate “up”).

Just like with scales, two (2) photographs of each item of evidence must be taken when using markers (see Use of Scales section).



Figure 5. Numbering markers are used to differentiate between five (5) separate bullet casing of the same caliber. The first photo is a mid-range photograph of the scene, followed by close-up photographs of each casing. Because the sizes of the casing will not change, they do not need to be photographed with a measuring device.



GRAFFITI VANDALISM PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs of graffiti vandalism require the standard series of evidence photos (overview, mid-range, and close-up) along with close-up photographs using a scale. Because graffiti vandalism is often removed after the initial report, it is important that the size and shape of the graffiti markings be measured prior to removal (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Graffiti vandalism photograph series. From top to bottom, left to right: Overview photograph, mid-range photograph, close-up photograph, and a close-up photograph with a scale.



BODILY INJURY PHOTOGRAPHS

When photographing injuries on a body, it is important to clearly identify the body on which the injury is located, as well as what part of the body the injury is located. To accomplish these, the following photos should be taken at a minimum of all injuries to both suspects and victims (see Figure 7):

1. Full-body overview photograph including the person's face. If the injury is not visible from the photo including the face (i.e., the injury is on the back), a second full-body photograph must be taken to show the injury location.
2. Mid-range photograph including the injured body part.
3. At least two (2) close-up photographs of the injury, one with a scale and one without. The most common scale is the smaller L-shaped ABFO #2.

When taking close-up photographs, be sure the entire photo is in sharp focus and there are no blurry edges. In the event a dead body is being photographed, photos of each angle must be taken.



Figure 7. Body Injury Photographs, from left to right: Whole-body overview, injury mid-range, injury close-up, and injury close-up with an ABFO #2 scale.



BURGLARY PHOTOGRAPHS

Burglary photographs must be taken similarly with any other crime scene photographs, with overview photographs, mid-range photographs, and close-up photographs. However, additional series of photos should be taken to account for the following factors:

- Overview, mid-range, and close-up photographs should be taken from both the exterior and interior of the building, including the point(s) of entry.
- If an exit/escape path is discovered, the same series of photos must be taken of the escape route to illustrate how the suspect left the scene.
- Any evidence found outside the building must also be photographed, such shoe and/or tire impressions.
- If there are no signs of forced entry, or the point of entry cannot be determined, a series of photographs should be taken of every entrance/exit to the building.

Photographs of pry marks, such as damage from crowbars and screwdrivers, can make it possible to link a tool to a crime when photographed correctly (and even better in conjunction with impression casting). Because tool markings would need to be compared to the actual tools, scales must be used to measure the size and shape of the marks, including height, width, and depth. As with most other evidence photography, overview, mid-range, and close-up photos of the tool marks must be captured.



VEHICLE DAMAGE PHOTOGRAPHS

Before photographing damage to vehicles (e.g., traffic collisions), it is important to take overview photos of each side of the vehicle. It is best practice to capture eight photos encircling the vehicle, but a *minimum* of four photos (one of each side) must be taken (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. A minimum of four (4) photos must be taken of vehicles. One photo of each: rear of vehicle, left side of vehicle, front of vehicle, and right side of vehicle.

After taking overview photographs of the vehicle, mid-range and close-up photographs of all damage must be taken. Scales should be used to measure the size of dents and/or scratches, as well as the height of vehicle damage from the surface of the roadway (see Figure 9). It is also best practice to photograph the VIN even if a vehicle is equipped with license plates.



Figure 9. Vehicle damage photographs must include a close-up photo without a scale and one with a scale. Depending on circumstances, the height of the damage should also be photographed using a measuring device.



USE OF FORCE PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs taken after a use of force incident can vary slightly depending on the circumstances. Typically, these photographs need to be taken anytime such force is used against a person that has caused a visible injury, including skin discoloration, bruising, and swelling. Photographs must also be taken following the use of any less-than-lethal weapon or personal body weapon (i.e., punches, kicks). Photographs do not necessarily need to be taken under these guidelines for incidents where only the visual display and/or pointing of a weapon occurred.

When taking evidence photography following a use of force, photos of the suspect should be taken using the same guidelines in the Bodily Injury Photographs section described above, with two additional factors when applicable:

1. When photographing injuries, photographs of the uninjured areas of the body must also be photographed.
2. In the event an officer is involved in a use of physical force that has resulted in a visible injury to the officer, photographs of the officer must also be taken in the same manner.

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