

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of Criminalistics: An Introduction to Forensic Science

REFERENCE: Saferstein, Richard, *Criminalistics: An Introduction to Forensic Science*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1977, 439 pages, no price listed.

The really good textbooks on criminalistics may be counted on the fingers on any typical one-handed person; this text would have to be included in that group. The text attempts, and achieves, a presentation of the major areas of physical evidence as well as a brief history of forensic science and defines the scope of the criminalistics enterprise.

The text excels in three major areas. First, the writing is particularly clear and concise; the treatment of each subject is entirely adequate to cover the basic rudiments of the subject under consideration. Second, the organization of the book is quite good, and it is evident that considerable thought went into the structure of the text and the order of presentation of the material. Third, the book is richly illustrated with drawing and photographs that are current, felicitous, and unambiguous. The lithography is adequate to convey the point intended in each figure.

In the preface of the book the author states that it is not the intention of the text to make scientists or forensic experts of the reader. The stated purposes are to serve as an introductory text for lower division courses in physical evidence, to serve as an aid to the investigator, and to bridge the gap between the forensic sciences and those in the legal profession. Dr. Saferstein is engagingly modest in these expectations, and this reviewer would like to propose a further audience. For the entry-level criminalist with an educational background primarily in chemistry or other discipline, this text will provide an excellent opportunity to look at "the big picture," to view the entire area of criminalistics in an even, comprehensive manner. Each topic is adequately covered, but not to the detriment of another.

A unique section of the text consists of the presentation of three actual cases in which several distinct themes in the forensic sciences were, in concert, brought to bear on the solution of the case. These cases illustrate quite well the interaction of forensic medicine, forensic serology, trace evidence analysis, and firearms identification in the investigation of crime.

References in the text consist of footnotes and suggested readings listed at the end of the chapters. The footnotes refer to articles with a special technical thrust, while the citations at the end of the chapters refer to more general articles. In the opinion of this reviewer, this is a very convenient manner in which to segregate the two types of references.

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The practicing criminalist will probably find few surprises in this text, but he may find some helpful ideas on how to explain a particular type of physical evidence to a judge or jury. For any person outside of the field, or who is a novice in the field, this book is an excellent place to start.