

## BOOK REVIEW

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# Review of Interpreting Evidence, Evaluating Forensic Science in the Courtroom

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**REFERENCE:** Robertson B, Vignaux GA, *Interpreting Evidence, Evaluating Forensic Science in the Courtroom*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, West Sussex, U.K., 1995.

*Interpreting Evidence* describes through logic and probability the interpretation of scientific evidence and how it should be presented in a court of law. It accurately and understandably illustrates the use of forensic evidence in conjunction with the other evidence in a case, rather than as an independent probability or value. The authors support the concept of the forensic scientist working in conjunction with the police and either the prosecution or defense. This would facilitate an understanding of the case as a whole and the alternative explanations or hypothesis for a particular piece of evidence. The book advocates allowing evidence to be expressed as a numerical value rather than in the form of probabilities. The authors describe how this method would apply to transfer

evidence (including: fingerprint, glass, fibers, and firearms); blood and DNA; as well as to behavioral and handwriting evidence.

The most fascinating aspect of the book are the actual case examples which help to illustrate the use of evidence applying the ascribed methods. The cases demonstrate how evidence was applied or interpreted incorrectly and how the methods advocated by the authors could have avoided the problems encountered in these cases. These cases help demonstrate the methodology and make the mathematical analysis more understandable.

Finally, the book describes some fallacies that both attorneys and expert witnesses must be aware of in the presentation of scientific evidence. In both civil and criminal litigation forensic evidence plays a vital role, and how such evidence is presented can be, and often is, the deciding factor in a case. While not recommended as a quick reference, this book, in its entirety, is essential reading for both the novice and veteran expert witness and lawyer in order to accurately present scientific evidence in the courtroom.

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