

# Eyewitness Basics

## What is testimonial evidence?

Testimonial evidence includes oral or written statements given to police as well as testimony in court by people who witnessed an event.

Eyewitness accounts can be a useful tool in helping investigators with analyzing crime scenes, but are not viewed to be highly reliable. In addition, eyewitness identifications (right or wrong) can have a big influence on the outcome of an investigation or trial.

## Witness Factors

Age may play a role in the accuracy of an eyewitness' statement or identification of a suspect.

The Cross Race Effect (CIRE) is a phenomenon in which people are better at recognizing faces of their own race rather than those of other races.

The use of drugs can alter a person's ability to recall the events of a crime even after they are no longer under the influence.

A person's memory of an event can be influenced by other witnesses, investigators, and/or the media. Investigators use open-ended questioning and procedures to limit their influence on a witness' memory of an event or identification of a suspect.

## Crime Scene & Suspect Factors

A crime that is extremely traumatic may affect a witness' recall of the event. For example, a witness confronted with a weapon tends to focus on the weapon rather than the perpetrator's face.

Someone who is able to focus on a perpetrator's face for a minute or longer will tend to have a more accurate memory than someone who saw the person for only a few seconds.

Faces that are either highly attractive/unattractive or distinctive are more likely to be accurately recognized. Simple disguises can interfere with accurate eyewitness identification, but piercings and tattoos increases the likelihood of an accurate identification.

The time of day in which the crime occurred and a person's view of the scene may affect what a he/she is able to see and remember.

Did you know? Eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions nationwide, playing a role in more than 75% of convictions overturned through DNA testing. (The Innocence Project, 2008)

## Memory Challenge

How many items do you remember? List them below.

## Crime Scene Challenge

Write the answers for each question in the space below.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_



## Facial Composites

Investigators work with sketch artists and eyewitnesses to create \_\_\_\_\_, or sketches of a person's face. Today many police departments are using facial reconstruction software to help them with this task.

The composite may be used internally to assist officers in identifying the suspect or used externally through local media (radio, TV, and newspaper) to solicit leads from citizens.



\_\_\_\_\_ is a software program that offers many options to recreate a person's facial features.