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Chapter 1 ***Observation Skills***

By the end of this chapter you will be able to:

- Define *observation* and describe what changes occur in the brain
- Describe examples of factors influencing eyewitness accounts of events
- Compare the reliability of eyewitness testimony with what actually happened



Chapter 1 ***Observation Skills***

By the end of this chapter you will be able to:

- Relate observation skills to their use in forensic science
- Define *forensic science*
- Practice and improve your observation skills



Forensic Science

- Application of Science to law; deal only with **facts**
- Observation – see the big picture, follow pattern to see details



People at the Crime Scene

- Perpetrator – criminal, suspect, person of interest.
- Witness – may see all or parts of crime; also events leading to crime
- 1st responder – law enforcement on patrol



1st Interaction with the Crime Scene

- A. Clear the scene – ensure immediate safety for the most individuals
- B. Check the victim(s) – ensure the victim's safety. Call for medical help if needed
- C. Secure the scene – the yellow tape. Only allow in those who absolutely must be there. Fewer = Better
- D. Wait for detective – may also be 1st responder
- E. Document the scene -



Documenting the Scene

1. Notes – report only facts; be descriptive
2. Pictures – “shoot your way in”
3. Video – with sound off
4. Rough Sketch – Hand drawn
5. Final Sketch – Digital rendering

Attempt to allow someone to recreate the scene exactly



Documenting the Scene

Crime Scene Sketch

Always Include

Measurement from 2 reference points

Direction – North

Facts

Never Include

Opinions

Analysis

Conclusions



Crime Scene Photography

Shoot your way in

1. Take overall pictures of the scene from multiple angles. Try to include entire scene
2. Take area/reference pictures of groups of evidence
3. Take individual pictures of pieces of evidence.
4. Take individual pictures of pieces of evidence with a scale



A rough sketch and final sketch should include:

- Compass heading designating north
- Location of all recovered physical evidence
- Measurements and a scale
- Location of walls, doors, and windows in the building on scene.

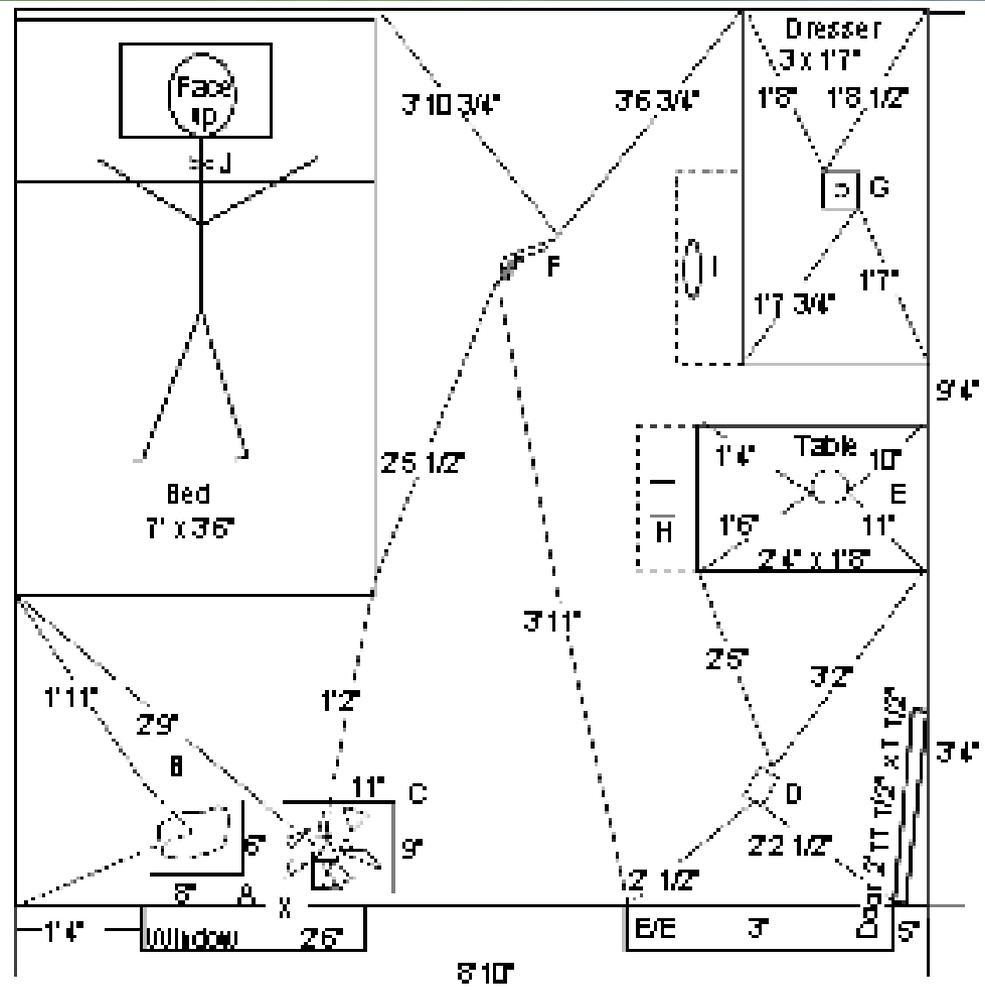
Drawing from class notes, the student will practice taking overall, reference and close up photos of a single item of evidence of their choice. Students will practice taking multiple photos but will be required to submit only four photographs, featuring the following elements: 1) Overall, 2) Reference or contextual photo, 3) Close up without scale, 4) Close up with scale.



- | Measurements | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Victim's Head | 6. Couch |
| 2. Victim's Foot | 7. Table |
| 3. Knife | 8. 1 Foot print |
| 4. Bullet Casing 1 | 9. Pill Bottle |
| 5. Bullet Casing 2 | |




N
 Not to Scale



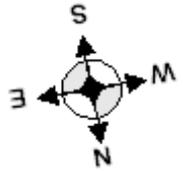
Legend

- A. Hole
- B. Red stain
- C. Glass fragments
- D. Shell casing
- E. Glass
- F. Pistol
- G. Bottle
- H. Canister
- I. Cigarette
- J. Neck injury

Title Block

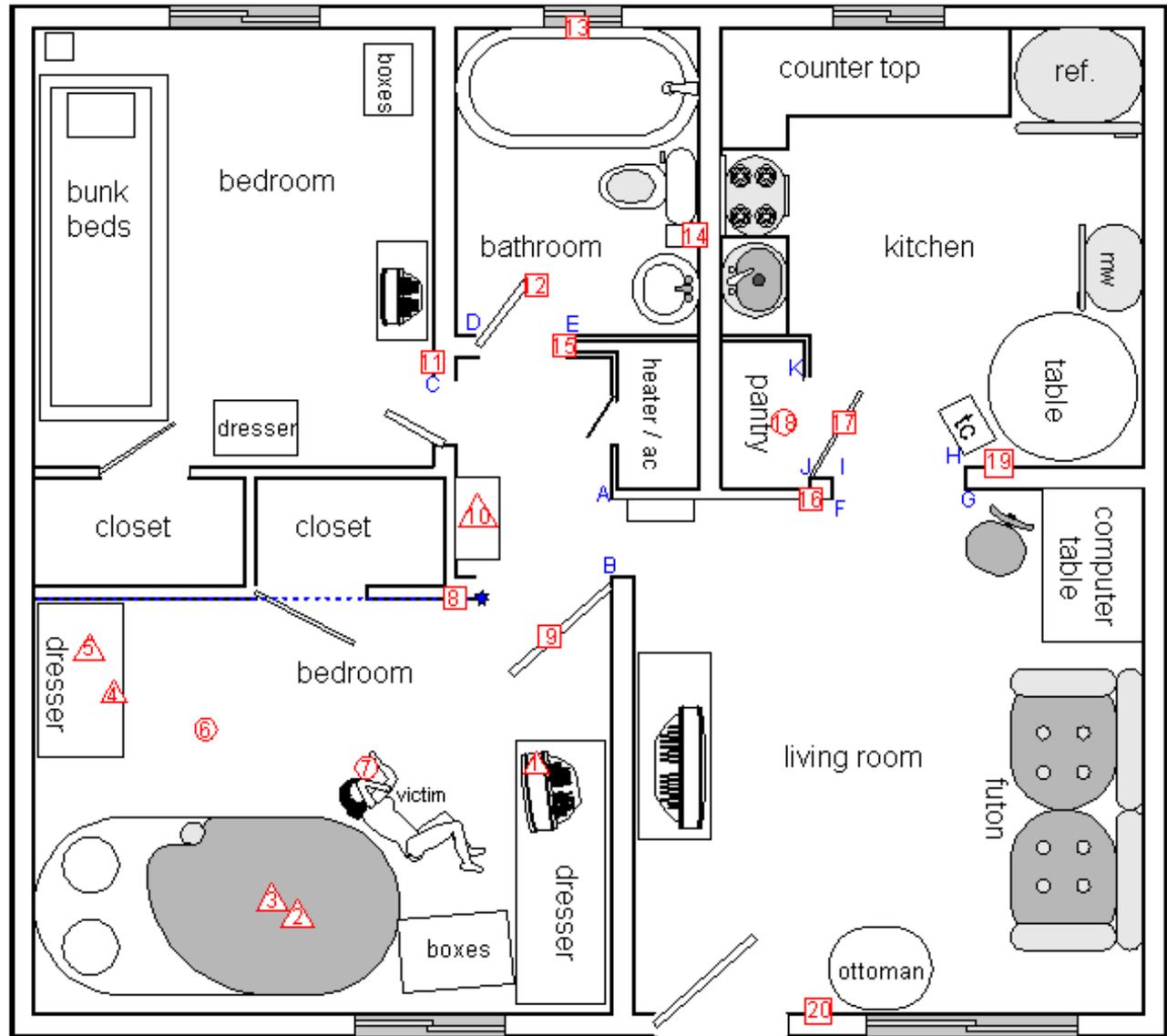
Case number: 0123-02-CID037
 Offense: Undetermined death
 Scene portrayed: Room #C-33, Bldg #3203,
 troop barracks
 Location: Fort Leonard Wood, MO 65473
 Victim: SGT Janet Williams
 Time & date began: 1115 2 Jan 02
 Sketched by: SA William Mac
 Verified by: SA John Friend

Homicide
 9-20-08 / 1619-08
 3005 Pleasant av. apt.2B
 diagram by investigator
 E.M. Henderson
NOT TO SCALE



LEGEND

- windows
- mw - microwave oven
- tc - trash can
- baseline
- baseline start point
- floor level horizontal evidence
- elevated horizontal evidence
- elevated vertical evidence
- A through K -measurement points





Introduction

The forensic examiner must be able to

1. **find**—identify the evidence
2. **document**—record the evidence
3. **interpret**—accurately determine the significance of the evidence



What Is Observation?

Our brains can filter out information.

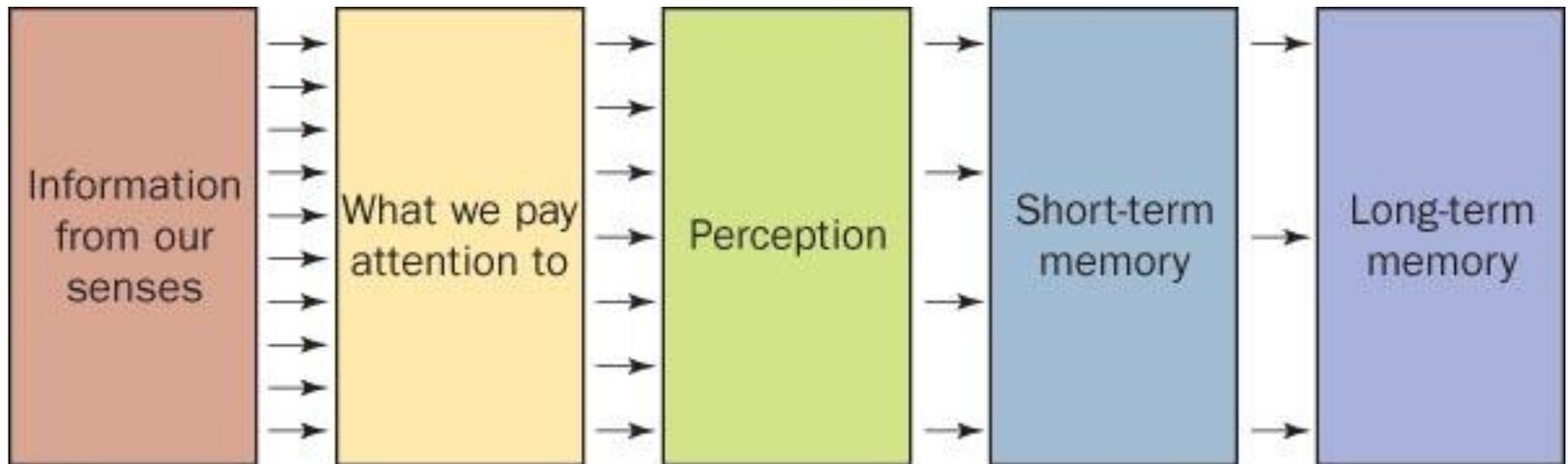


Point out some of the details in this photo.



What Is Observation?

How information is processed in the brain





What Is Observation?

Our brains fill in gaps in our perception

- In order to make sense of what we perceive, our brains often enrich with detail what we see, taste, hear, smell, or feel
- After an event, we can believe things were part of the background even though they were not



What Is Observation?

Our brains apply previous knowledge to new situations



What assumptions can you make about this scene?
How might those assumptions be wrong?



Observations by Witnesses

Observations are affected by:

- Their emotional states
- Whether they were alone, part of a group, or near others
- What type of and how much activity was going on around them

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voAntzB7EwE>



Eyewitness Accounts

- o Crime-scene reports often vary, due to:
 - level of interest
 - stress
 - concentration
 - amount and kind of distractions present
 - prejudices
 - personal beliefs
 - motives
 - any lapse in time since the event

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY



The Innocence Project

- Barry C. Scheck and Peter J. Neufeld
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law,
- Beginning in 1992, used DNA to examine post-conviction cases to provide conclusive **proof of innocence**
- Faulty eyewitness identifications accounted for up to 87% of the wrongful convictions



How to be a Good Observer

1. Observe systematically

- Start at one part of a crime scene and run your eyes slowly over every space
- Look carefully at details of each piece of evidence
- Do not assume you will remember everything



How to be a Good Observer

2. Turn off filters

- o Consciously pay attention to all details
- o Do not pay attention to just what you *think* is important
- o All details are potentially important



How to be a Good Observer

3. Collect Information first, interpret data later

- Look for patterns and make connections
- More information yields better interpretations
- Prejudices exist everywhere—
 - eyewitness accounts
 - your own thinking processes



How to be a Good Observer

4. Documentation, Documentation, Documentation

- Write down and photograph as much information as possible
- Be aware that memory is faulty
- Remember that our brains tend to fill in gaps in our perceptions



Observations in Forensics

- Study situations
- Find clues in ordinary details
- Work backwards from the evidence to what led up to the crime
- Be patient
- Practice



..... Summary

- The environment and our natural sensory filters affect our ability to observe
- Eyewitness reports can be correct, faulty, or a little of both
- Acquiring good observation skills takes practice and training



Summary

- Forensic scientists:
 - Find and Document Evidence
 - Evaluate and Interpret
 - Provide expert testimony to courts