

Book Review

By

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Dutelle, A.W. (2011), *An Introduction to Crime Scene Investigation*, Jones and Bartlett Publishers: Sudbury, MA, 532 pgs.

Upon hearing about this new textbook designed for students of criminal justice or the trendy “forensic based investigation” programs in higher education I was hopeful, just as the author suggests, there is a “chasm” between the academic world and the real work of crime scene investigations. Upon review of the text, I truly believe the chasm is smaller but still it is wide. The author, himself with this textbook, seems to narrow it and in the end widens it.

The title, *An Introduction to Crime Scene Investigation*, and the author’s preface would indicate that this text is the book for the over 400 academic programs in the USA in need, that is “to present a foundation in crime scene investigation”. The text is written as a “single-source” reference for the day-to-day aspects of crime scene investigation. Terrific! Criminal justice students of various concentrations absolutely need a text to fulfill this need. This text seems to succeed in accomplishing its goal initially but succumbs to the temptation to mix crime scene investigation with forensic science. In doing so, we are right back where the author does not want to be...confusing “real” crime scene investigation with “real” forensic science. Ironically, the author explicitly reminds the student reader that crime scene investigation, criminal investigations, and forensic analysis of physical evidence are done by three distinctly different groups of professionals and not the fictional television shows “CSI-Las Vegas, New York, and Miami”, but nonetheless the material presented in the text blends them all together. The “CSI Effect” of this text, this blurring of three distinct jobs, is my biggest concern about the text and its intended audience.

The textbook has three sections: CSI, Physical Evidence, and Special Investigations. For obvious reasons the first section would be the place for the step-by-step processes when investigating a crime scene. Instead it consists of a chapter on the history of crime scene investigations (very interesting, but I am a history nut), a chapter on the CSI Effect, a third on the

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ethics and legal concerns of scene investigation, a chapter dedicated to the first responder at crime scenes, a fourth chapter on specialized personnel and safety concerns, and finally, in the six chapter a methodical approach to processing a crime scene. Chapter Two, “The CSI Effect” is necessary, but it is the place where the blurring of crime scene investigation and forensic science starts. The author discusses the impact of the CSI effect generally, its impact in the courts, the impact towards criminals, and unfortunately, spends a good bit of the chapter discussing the CSI Effect and **forensic science education**. If this is a textbook for the criminal investigator it doesn’t apply to forensic science majors. The ethics chapter nicely presents the morals and values of ethics. It represents legal doctrines and further blurs crime scene investigation and forensic science by discussing the recent ethical issues of forensic laboratories and not ethical issues at the crime scene. Skipping to Chapter Five, a chapter on specialized personnel, a full three pages are used to talk about TWGS and SWGs that relate to forensic science and not crime scene investigations. The section on the preliminary scene survey reiterates the NIJ’s version and not the author’s own work. The chapter’s redeeming value is found in the discussions of safety concerns and issues at the crime scene. Back to Chapter Four, a chapter for first responders, it is well done and can be used for the “real” first responder and crime scene investigator. However, five pages of the chapter are reprints directly from the 2004 NIJ publication, “Crime Scene Investigation: A Reference for Law Enforcement”. Chapter Six is the chapter that presents that material that meets the stated purpose of the author. It is the material that presents “how to properly process a crime scene” from documentation to packaging of evidence. It is done well but more information on searching or enhancement methods for trace or unseen or latent physical evidence of all types is needed. There is nothing on final scene surveys. All total this chapter presents 31 pages of what is really crime scene investigation and it begins on page 103 and ends on page 134.

The remainder of the text is devoted to different specific types of physical evidence and specific, special crime scenes. The biggest blurring crime scene investigation and forensic science is found in section two. The techniques for searching for and visualizing/enhancing various types of physical evidence are presented. Great stuff, but for many of the types of evidence the author goes too far, he begins to talk about specific issues within each type of evidence that are necessary for the forensic scientist and not the crime scene investigator. For example, while interesting, the crime scene investigator is not likely to use the PDQ database for chemical and color information about paint chips. A crime scene investigator is not going to testify about the pharmacology of controlled substances, the chemical structure and base pairing on the DNA molecule, and the microscopic staining methods for spermatozoa identification. While all the information presented in Section Two is correct and academically useable, it has no place in an introduction to crime scene investigation textbook. It will enhance the blurring issue address above.

The final section of the text addresses “Specialized Investigations”: death investigations and special scene considerations. The chapter on death investigations is basic forensic pathology and will serve the medio-legal investigator well. The special concerns for crime scene investigations are a good primer on underwater scenes and buried remains.

Finally, the remainder of the text is a series of appendices. Most of the appendices information is useful and well placed in this basic crime scene investigation text. However, there are some appendices that appear to have been added to the text with a confused purpose. Appendix B lists and explains the forensic databases. While the databases may have an occasional use by crime scene investigators, these databases exist for more frequent use by forensic scientists analyzing a specific type of evidence. Appendix E looks at processing the scene of mass fatalities and would be a perfect fit for Chapter 18 Special Scene Considerations. Appendix G, Drugs of Abuse: Uses and Effects, is completely misplaced in this textbook.

In summary, while the author states that he sought to create a daily, useful, realistic, step-by-step, single-source textbook on crime scene investigation, he ended up with a cluttered and cumbersome text that most “real” crime scene investigators will not use. There is too much in the text to be used by these professionals. Students of crime scene investigation with some careful editing could use the text. The editing would need to include elimination of the forensic science references and analytical techniques that continue to blur the lines between crime scene investigators and forensic scientists. Eliminate NIJ reprinting. The author is an experienced crime scene investigator. Use your own words; you and your words have standing. The resulting text may not be 532 pages in length, but it will be very useful as an academic textbook and be useful for the practicing professional.