

ANTHROPOLOGY/SOCIOLOGY 362: Forensic Investigations
University of La Verne, Spring 2010
MW 8:00-9:30 am, Hoover Building 117

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In this course you will receive an overview of forensic investigations from the origins and history of forensic science to the techniques, skills, and limitations of the modern laboratory and the analysis of evidence. It will address the processing, preservation, and documentation of crime/event scenes; types and significance of physical and trace evidence; analyses of various organic and inorganic evidence types; range of interpretations derived from analytical results; reconstructions of crime/event scenes; and its presentation in court. Forensic techniques can be applied to a wide range of fields, not just criminology—we will look at some of those applications over the duration of this course.

Course Structure and Evaluations

There will be two lectures per week, and it is in your best interest to attend them all. You will be given a series of assigned readings and exercises that include analytical reviews (3 in all), critical thinking exercises (10 sets), a critical review of either Cornwall's *Portrait of a Killer* OR one of Kathy Reich's books, a research paper (only one, but this is the bulk of your grade), chapter summaries/reactions, a series of quizzes/mini-exams (to be announced), and virtual laboratory exercises. Your grade in this class will be based on your performance on each of these assignments, along with your participation in class.

Notice, there is a significant amount of writing and critical thinking required in this class. All of it is geared toward developing your skills as an observer and critical thinker. So, give your brain a break; don't fall behind in either your readings or assignments. I expect all assignments to be completed and delivered on the due date. Late assignments will be accepted, *but* they will not receive full credit (no exceptions, really).

We will have one or two guest speakers, dates to be announced. The topics scheduled for that day will be rescheduled, with additional modifications made to the syllabus as needed.

Critical Thinking Exercises: You will have ten (10) sets of exercises in deductive reasoning. These are essentially logic exercises where you will be given a statement that includes a premise followed by a conclusion. You will be asked to determine if the conclusion is supported by the weight of the facts presented in the premise.

Chapter Reactions: Summarize each of the 15 chapters within our textbook, *Forensic Archaeology*. Summaries should be no more than one page (double-spaced) long and should outline the most salient points within the chapter, as well as a brief discussion about what you found of greatest interest within the chapter.

Analytical Reviews: Prepare one analytical review for three (3) cases presented on the Famous Trials website: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/ftrials.htm>. Each case includes a presentation of the evidence in a specific historical trial, using trial transcripts and other materials. For your review, you must 1) summarize the case, 2) describe the evidence presented or referred to in the case, 3) discuss its presentation, 4) determine if the verdict was supported by the evidence, and 5) address the question: if you were in charge of the evidence for this case, using all the techniques available to you today, what would you collect, analyze and prepare for the trial?

Each analytical review should be no more and no less than five pages long (typed, double-spaced) and handed in as assigned.

Critical Review: This will be a three to five page (typed, double-spaced) evaluation of the forensic science employed in EITHER Patricia Cornwall's *Portrait of a Killer* OR one of Kathy Reich's novels. In this review, you will be demonstrating your ability to compile and critically evaluate very specific information on forensic methods. It may also involve additional research in the library (with references cited at the end of your commentary). Look at this assignment as an opportunity to develop and hone your analytical skills!

Critical Review of Portrait: This is a practical exercise in critical thinking and an application of your analytical abilities. I expect you to evaluate Cornwall's line of reasoning and the evidence she uses to identify Jack the Ripper with Walter Sickert. Is her argument solid, for example, or are there additional questions raised? What are those questions? What information was omitted from her argument? If you were in her place, what would you do differently in establishing the identity of Jack the Ripper? Do you think that would change the nature of the overall line of reasoning? I am sure you will come up with additional questions as you proceed through this exercise.

Whether you choose Cornwall's *Portrait* or one of Kathy Reich's books, your critique should include a 1) brief summary of the book; 2) constructive criticism which specifically addresses the forensic methods employed, such as major strengths and weaknesses, consistencies and inconsistencies, problem definition, assumptions, data analysis, interpretation, conclusions, whether the interpretation is convincing (does it make sense to you, can you think of other alternatives); and, 3) conclusions, your overall assessment on the quality of the research and presentation, including whether the book is well written, well organized, did you enjoy it (or not). **Remember, your goal is to construct a thoughtful, thorough and critical review of this book with an eye toward the use of forensic methods!**

Research Paper: Do I really need to go over this? Your research paper will be on a topic of your choosing, the only restriction is that it must focus on evidence. Your paper can outline a specific case study, a site, an historical event, an enigmatic subject related to forensics; in short, it can be about anything in the history of our presence on this planet, from any time period and any region in the world. Whatever you select, it should be something you are interested in and it should be defined as **narrowly** as possible—I expect you to be able to thoroughly and thoughtfully address your the topic in at least 10 pages (Chicago style—ASA or AAA), not including references (which I want annotated).

Your paper must 1) define your topic and 2) provide a context in which it is to be understood and evaluated. From there, you should 3) provide a disinterested description of the site, case, event, or whatever you have selected as your focus. This should be followed by 4) a discussion of the forensic methods/applications/evidence involved, what work has already been completed in its evaluation, the

assumptions/limitations involved, the goals, the results, what questions were generated, what questions remain unanswered, and so on. The last part of your paper should be 5) an overall evaluation of the topic/evidence/case/method, as well as your assessment of what ought to be done next, if anything. Does any of this sound familiar? Your research paper is simply a critical evaluation of a forensic topic of your choosing (typed, double-spaced), and it is due May.

Mini-Exams or Quizzes: Mini-exams or quizzes will be administered on a fairly irregular basis throughout the term. The main purpose is to determine if you have been able to integrate many of the concepts we have covered throughout the course. There will be no make-up exams.

Virtual Laboratory Exercises: We have no formal forensic laboratory, however we are in the process of developing one. As such, you will have an opportunity to gain some laboratory experience through a virtual laboratory exercise.

Speakers: We will have one or two guest speakers who are professionals in the field of forensics. Their topics and speaking dates will be announced.

Grades: Your overall grade will be distributed across the assignments as follows—a) analytical reviews (20%); b) critical thinking exercises (10%); c) critical review (10%); d) virtual laboratory exercises (10%); e) research paper (40%); and f) chapter reactions and exams (10%). Participation in the class is factored in as a buffer; if your grade is on the boundary of two grades, your participation will automatically qualify you for the better of the two grades.

Web Resources: This syllabus is also located on www.exhumanitas.com along with other information on special features, links to information sources, book recommendations, and special posts.

Required Texts

Lissitzyn, C.B. (2008) *Forensic Evidence in Court: A Case Study Approach*. Carolina Academic Press, Durham, North Carolina.

Saferstein, R. (2008) *Virtual Forensic Science Lab*. Pearson-Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

Notes of Importance

Note 1: the following schedule is tentative and is subject to modification. Let's face it, stuff happens making it necessary to re-evaluate deadlines, schedules and the like.

Note 2: for the sake of my sanity and yours, TURN OFF YOUR CELLULAR PHONES!

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment	Reading
1	Feb 1-3	Introduction and Orientation Forensics and the Art of Thinking Critically What are the Questions? Critical Thinking and Ethics	W 2/3: List of top three cases from Famous Trial website	
2 3	Feb 8-10 Feb 15-17 <i>*Feb 15: President's Day, holiday</i>	Nature of Evidence Chains of Custody Collecting & Preserving Evidence Methods & Analysis Crime Scenes, Logic Trees and Hypothesized Reconstructions	M 2/8: Lab 1 W 2/10: Critical Thinking 1 W 2/17: Critical Thinking 2 Chapter Reactions	Ch 1-2
4	Feb 22-24 <i>*Feb 22: class canceled</i>	Biometric Evidence Fingerprints and Patterns of Personal Identification	W 2/24: Critical Thinking 3 Chapter Reactions	Ch 3
5 6	Mar 1-3 Mar 8-10	Trace and Transfer Evidence Glass and Soil Fiber, Fabric and Hair	M 3/1: Lab 2 W 3/3: Critical Thinking 4 M 3/8: Lab 3 W 3/10: Critical Thinking 5 Chapter Reactions	Ch 4-5
7	Mar 15-17	<i>SPRING BREAK</i> <i>**this would be a good time to work on your Analytical Reviews, Critical Review and Research Paper</i>		
8 9 10	Mar 22-24 Mar 29-31 Apr 5-7	Biological Evidence Blood and Teeth Forensic Anthropology and Bones Entomology Body Fluids DNA	M 3/22: Lab 4 W 3/24: Critical Thinking 6 M 3/29: Lab 5 Analytical Review 1 W 3/31: Critical Thinking 7 M 4/5: Lab 6 W 4/7: Critical Thinking 8 Chapter Reactions	Ch 6-8
11 12	Apr 12-14 Apr 19-21	Chemical Evidence Drug Analysis Forensic Toxicology Arson, Accelerants and Explosives	M 4/12: Lab 7 Analytical Review 2 W 4/14: Critical Thinking 9 M 4/19: Lab 8 Analytical Review 3 W 4/21: Critical Thinking 10 Chapter Reactions	Ch 9-10

13 14 15	Apr 26-28 May 3-5 May 10-12	Physical Patterns Tool Marks Fire Arms Questioned Documents Computers, Databases and Cybercrime	M 4/26: Lab 9 M 5/3: Lab 10 CRITICAL REVIEW M 5/10: Lab 11 W 5/12: Chapter Reactions	Ch 11-13
16	May 17-19	Interpreting Evidence Reconstructions, Odds and Ends (e.g., Forensic Psychology) Future Directions	M 5/17: Lab 12 RESEARCH PAPER W 5/19: Chapter Reactions	Ch 14-15
FIN	May 24	FINALS WEEK BEGINS	Lab 13 due Monday, 10 am	

*This schedule is divided into thematic blocks. It is up to you to review the relevant chapters in preparation for lecture topics.

A Word about Writing, whether in this class or another

The aim of any writing project is for you to explore a particular question or problem, developing an argument that encapsulates your solution concerning the question you are discussing. It is NOT intended that you ‘write all you know’ about the topic, or merely summarize the views of a textbook. In our class project, you are asked to plan and develop a research topic of your own choosing. Once you come up with a research topic, think about your topic and do some background reading to help you narrow your topic to one that best suits your intellectual curiosity.

1. In selecting a research topic, think about your interests. What topic have you wanted to investigate in other classes but haven’t had the opportunity to do so? What piques your interest? What presents a challenge to you? You may need to do some background reading to help narrow your topic of interest. When you have selected a topic, think hard about what the topic involves, what is the question that keeps coming forward? Do some analytical thinking about this, and about ways of approaching the question to explore its meanings and problems, and develop a response.
2. Start reading early, well before the assignment due dates. Find relevant references by following up bibliographies in a textbook and using the references listed in academic articles.
3. Always keep notes on the sources (articles) you are reading—author, title, journal title, year of publication and publisher, and the page number of all material. There is nothing more frustrating than not being able to track down where you found a useful quote.
4. Get into the habit of putting your notes in your own words, as it is a good way of checking whether you are following an argument. Always be careful to include quotation marks around any phrases or sentences that you take directly from the readings, otherwise you could easily slip into presenting an author’s work as your own (that would be *plagiarism*, which as you know is an unethical practice!).
5. Now, to make an argument, you need to structure your writing. Work out an outline of the points you want to cover, the order in which they best support your argument, and suitable supporting evidence or specific examples you want to use.

6. It is important to use specific examples to illustrate and substantiate your points.
7. Wherever possible use diagrams, maps, graphs, and other illustrations to support your argument. Such visual materials are an important part of communication.
8. Keep to the set word/page limit—it is part of the exercise. To be able to develop your ideas concisely is an important skill, and working with a word or page limit gives you valuable practice. However, footnotes, reference lists, or any appendices do not come into the word/page count—they are extra. It is important to be highly selective in what you include. Remember that you can summarize and condense material and reference the sources, you do not have to re-state it all in your paper.
9. Get someone else to read a draft of your paper. They don't have to know anything about your topic—but they should still be able to follow your ideas. They will quickly tell you if the ideas and information are unclear, or poorly expressed, if the paper is too long and repetitive or needs expansion on some points. You can also try reading your paper aloud, as this is a good way to find out how it sounds. Try to prepare your draft a few days or so before the paper is due to allow time for your own assessment and revision.
10. You should prepare an initial draft and then try to evaluate it, possibly several times, and where necessary change the structure or contents. Aim to polish the organization, your ideas and the clarity of your expression.
11. As a way of improving your expression, find an article that you have enjoyed reading and study how it is written—the structure and style the author has used.
12. Please keep a copy of your paper in case of problems.