Eyewitness Basics

Pros & Cons of Testimonial Evidence

Presentation developed by T. Trimpe 2006  http://sciencespot.net/
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 a crime scene, 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.
People are likely to view the same scene in different ways depending on their **positions**, **line of sight**, **familiarity** with the area, and other factors that can interfere with a person’s ability to remember details.
Memory Challenge

Directions:
You will have 30 seconds to view the next screen.
Try to memorize all 20 items you see!

You are NOT allowed to write anything down
You CANNOT talk to anyone else.
Items to remember ...
What do you remember?
You have 2 minutes to list as many of the items as you can!

How did you do?
All 20 – Awesome
15-19 – Great
10-14 – Pretty swell
5-9 – Could be better
4 or Less – Wake up
According to The Innocence Project (2008) "Eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions nationwide, playing a role in more than 75% of convictions overturned through DNA testing." Still, the criminal justice system profoundly relies on eyewitness identification and testimony for investigating and prosecuting crimes (Wells & Olson, 2003).

What factors affect a person’s memory and their ability to identify a suspect?

Source: http://www.helium.com/items/1276135-accurate-eyewitness-accounts
Witness Factors

• **Age** may play a role in the accuracy of an eyewitness’ statement or identification of a suspect. Studies have shown that when a lineup **contains** the actual **culprit**, both young children and elderly **perform well**, but when the lineup does **not contain** the culprit there is a higher rate of **mistaken** identifications.

• The **race** of the witness may also play a role. The Cross Race Effect (CRE) is a phenomenon in which people are **better at recognizing** faces of their **own race** rather than those of other races.

Source: http://www.helium.com/items/1276135-accurate-eyewitness-accounts
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 follow procedures for conducting line-ups to limit their influence on a witness’ memory of an event or identification of a suspect.

Source: http://www.helium.com/items/1276135-accurate-eyewitness-accounts
A crime that is extremely traumatic for an eyewitness may affect his/her 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.

Source: http://www.helium.com/items/1276135-accurate-eyewitness-accounts
Studies have shown that faces that are either highly attractive, highly unattractive, or distinctive are more likely to be accurately recognized. Simple disguises, such as hats or sunglasses, can interfere with accurate eyewitness identification. However, body piercings and tattoos increase the likelihood of an accurate identification.

The time of day in which the crime occurred as well as a person’s view of the scene may affect what a he/she is able to see. In addition, a person who is familiar with the area in which the crime took place, may have a better recall of the positions of the victims or suspects.
Now that your eyes and brain are warmed up, let’s test your observation skills a bit more.

You will have 2 minutes to study the photograph of a crime scene on the next slide.

Try to pay attention to details as you will be asked 10 questions about the crime scene!

You are not allowed to write anything down until after the time is up.

Ready?
Answer each question below.

1. What color coffee mug was in the picture?  Blue   Red   Yellow

2. When was the deadline?  Yesterday   Today   Tomorrow

3. What time was on the clock on the wall?  10:40   11:05   1:55

4. How many sticky notes were on the whiteboard?  Four   Six   Eight

5. Which of the following was NOT in the picture?  Stapler   Trash Can   Printer

6. What was the name on the plaque on the desk?  Bill   Brian   Carl

7. What color was the victim's shirt?  Black   Blue   Red

8. How many plants were in the picture?  None   One   Two

9. What was the color of the marker in the desk drawer?  Red   Blue   Green

10. Where was the book in the picture?  On a box   In the trash can   Under the body

Source: http://forensics.rice.edu/html/picture_begin.html
Answer each question below.

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Facial Composites

Investigators work with sketch artists and eyewitnesses to create facial composites, 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.

FACES – A software program that offers many options to help you recreate a person’s facial features.