

Crime Scene Photography Step-by-Step

Session Materials

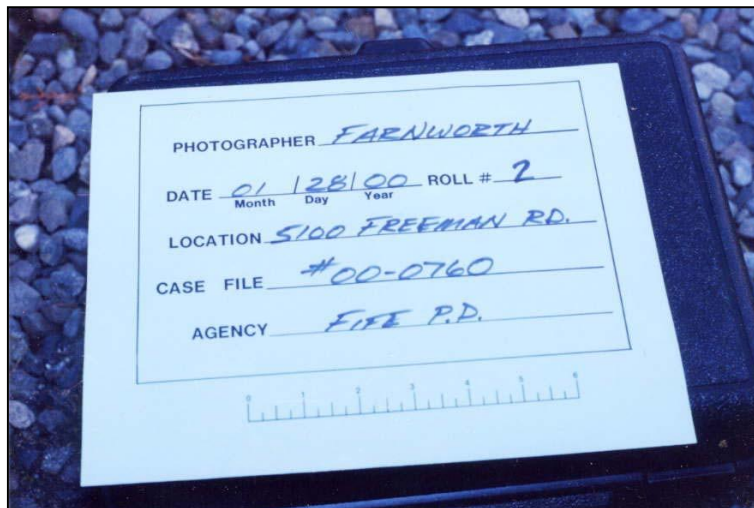
“A picture is worth a thousand words.”

The primary function of crime scene photographs is to document the scene so that it can be later conveyed to other law enforcement officials, attorneys, and jurors. Crime scene photographs compliment the other methods an officer will use to document a crime scene, such as notes, general offense report, and diagrams.

Crime scene photography should include shots that cover the overall scene, midrange, as well as close-ups. Follow these steps when you're photographing your crime scene.

STEP 1. Photograph a *Data Sheet*

Your data sheet is like a film director's clapboard. It should contain your case number, the name of the photographer, the date the photos were taken, your crime scene's location (an address for instance), and the name of your department.



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STEP 2. Take *Overall* Photographs

These are also known as your 'establishing shots.' Not only should you photograph the crime scene from a distance, but you first need to photograph a reference point. In patrol work, your reference point will often be the street signs of the nearest intersection. However, your particular crime scene might not have such a reference point, so you must find one. The *overall* photographs should cover 360 degrees, and this can be done in two ways.

- a. 360 degrees around the scene itself: For instance, if your crime was committed inside a residence, you would want to take overall photographs from a distance on all four sides of the house.
- b. 360 degrees around the photographer: Taking a photograph from a distance, toward what you have determined to be the front of your crime scene. The photographer can spin on his axis 360 degrees in order to document the structures and environment that surrounds him.

It should be noted that the crime scene photographer should consider using both methods, and that option "b" is extremely useful when your *overall* and *midrange* shots are conducted in doors.



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STEP 3. Take *Midrange* Photographs

Now you're going to get a little closer. If your crime scene is contained within a residence you want to photograph the address as well as your approach to the scene, i.e. as you walk toward the front door. Also consider taking additional photographs of the four outside walls.



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STEP 4. Take *Close-up* Photographs

Once you reach the threshold or entrance to the crime scene, your first photograph should be of the entire room and all the evidence. You need to photograph from the four walls of your room. Of course we just don't walk into a crime scene without first surveying it. Trampling on evidence, or contaminate your crime scene is something a patrol officer must avoid.

Next, if you have a victim and can accomplish this without disturbing the body, you should photograph their face for identification. Also photograph any visible injuries or wounds. Then any specific objects that might be related to the specific injuries or wounds in question.

It must be mentioned that when you take your photographs, you should first photograph the evidence by itself without the presence of evidentiary placards, and then with placards which will mark each specific item. Use rulers or scales to convey relative size. Remember that if you can't photograph an item because of its location, all you have to do is photograph the area of where it was located then document it thoroughly in your reports. Finally, remember that your shots should overlap.

