

Wake County Bureau of Forensic Services
Crime Scene Science Division Technical Manual

Effective Date: 1/26/2024

Chapter 9: Sketching the Crime Scene

Issued By: Director

Chapter 9: Sketching the Crime Scene

1. Purpose

1.1 To establish a list of actions to be taken to ensure that the crime scene is documented properly through sketching, when appropriate, which may be used to create a final sketch.

1.2 A crime scene sketch may be made to accurately describe a crime scene, indicate scene-related measurements, the location of evidence, and aid in the reconstruction of a scene.

1.3 Rough sketches may be completed for any investigation where scene reconstruction may be needed. The information transcribed to the rough sketch shall be accurate and detailed enough to ensure that a final sketch can be completed at a later time. Final sketches will be completed on a case-by-case basis upon request by the Office of the District Attorney or the investigating agency.

1.4 All original sketches created will be retained in the case file. Measurements are considered approximates.

2. Materials

- Directional compass
- Paper (graph or plain)
- Writing instrument(s)
- Measurement devices, (i.e., rulers, 25' or longer tape, surveyor's wheel, electronic measuring devices, etc.)

3. Procedures

3.1 The relative positions of the object(s) should be incorporated into a sketch.

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3.2 The sketch should include the following information:

- Measurements (either on the sketch or on a separate piece of paper)
- Major items of evidence and critical items of the scene
- Wake County Bureau of Forensic Services case number
- Date of sketch
- Name or initials of the person creating sketch
- Location of the scene/sketch
- Compass direction (north arrow) or directionality indicator
- Notation that sketch is “not to scale” or “scale” if drawn to scale
- Legend of items included on the sketch.

3.3 Types of sketches:

- **Rough sketch:** Rough sketches are normally completed at the scene and should include all information to accurately and completely represent the scene, measurements, evidence items and directions.
- **Final sketches:** Final sketches are neat and accurate sketches completed based upon the rough sketches.

3.4 Measurements:

3.4.1 Objects measured for documentation purposes should be measured from two (2) fixed points. This will accurately locate the item's position for future reference. Fixed points are items that are permanently fixed or not easily moved such as: Utility poles, fire hydrants, the corner of a building, etc. The fixed points used should be documented in detail to include identifying numbers.

3.4.2 Commonly accepted measurement methods are:

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- **Baseline (coordinate method):** A line is designated between two fixed points and measurements are taken to objects at right angles from the designated line. Measurement along the designated line as well as the distance from the line shall be documented. The direction along the line and from the line that the measurements were taken shall be documented.
- **Triangulation:** Two fixed points are designated and each item measured is done so in a straight line from each fixed point and documented accordingly.
- **GPS:** In many outdoor scenes (woods, lake, etc.), items routinely used as fixed points are not available. In such circumstances, GPS latitude and longitude measurements may be used to designate fixed points as long as the measurements and fixed-point designations are accurately described and documented.

3.4.3 It is imperative for accurate measurements that fixed points are determined. One such acceptable method of measuring is to drive two pieces of rebar into the ground to be used as fixed points. At the conclusion of the investigation, the rebar should be driven deep enough in the ground to prevent accidental removal.

4. Limitations

4.1 Measuring devices have a certain amount of variability due to manufacture and use and should be considered approximate in nature.

5. Safety Considerations

5.1 None

6. References

6.1 Gardner, R. M., & Krouskup, D. R. (2019). Pages 147-178 In *Practical Crime Scene Processing and Investigation* (Third). CRC Press.

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Document Revision History

Revision Date	Prepared By	Revision
1/26/2024	B. Fail	Detailed procedure. Numbered chapters of Crime Scene Science Technical Manual, Header and Revision History updated to new format.
10/30/2024	A. Abernethy	Document revised to reflect the agency name change from Raleigh/Wake City-County Bureau of Identification to Wake County Bureau of Forensic Services, effective December 1, 2024. No change to procedure content.