

Book Review

Huber and Headrick's Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals, Second Edition

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Harralson, H. and Miller, L. (2018) *Huber and Headrick's Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals, Second Edition*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida, ISBN 9781498751308, 420 pages, \$99.95.

Earlier this year, *Huber and Headrick's Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals, Second Edition*, was released by CRC Press. This new edition is a collaborative effort by two American forensic document examiners, Heidi H. Harralson and Larry S. Miller. The original edition, now nearly twenty years old, was a collaborative effort by two Canadian forensic document examiners, Roy A. Huber and Alfred M. (Tom) Headrick.

This new edition, according to the synopsis on the back cover, "...is a comprehensive update of Huber and Headrick's seminal work on handwriting examination...while remaining true to [their] spirit and approach...".

Substantial text from the original edition is preserved in the new edition. Appropriately, the new edition's title incorporates the original authors' surnames. Huber and Headrick are explicitly acknowledged in the new edition's preface.

The new edition uses descriptive headings, rather than the question-and-answer format of the original edition. The core of the original edition – the Discriminating Elements of Handwriting – is maintained with minor revisions. Gone is the chapter on graphology, but some of its text has been relocated elsewhere in the new edition. References are listed alphabetically in the back of the new edition, rather than in order of appearance after each chapter.

Edits, revisions and updates made to the original text blend well in some instances, but in other instances, not as successfully. This new edition, like its predecessor, is a difficult read due to the writing style.

Nearly 200 new references, primarily from peer-reviewed publications, have been added to

the original 600 references. Over 100 new illustrations supplement this new edition. Information on electronic signatures, digitized handwriting, and automated handwriting verification has been incorporated.

There are shortcomings in this new edition. The discussion under statistical inference in the identification process on pages 59 through 61 is badly flawed with respect to Bayes Theorem and the likelihood ratio. It is uncorrected from the original edition. Ostrum provides detailed comments on these flaws.¹ In the same discussion, the new edition transposes two references on page 61; correctly Olkin (1958) read a paper which Hilton (1958) explained.

The discussion under sources for competent document examiners on page 321 is weak. It does not clearly distinguish between accredited, independent certification boards and membership organizations. Neither the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners (ABFDE) nor the Board of Forensic Document Examiners (BFDE) is identified as being accredited by the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB). The discussion incorrectly implies that the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE) offers a certification program.

The significance of Srihari et al. (2002) study on handwriting individuality is overstated. While supportive of the notion of heterogeneity of handwriting, Srihari's study neither "...established the individuality of handwriting in forensic iden-

¹ Brent's FDE Blog, article "Huber, Headrick & Bayes...", posted on December 11, 2015, authored by R. B. Ostrum, at <http://rbostrum.ca/wp/huber-headrick-bayes/#more-14>.

tification..." on pages 44 and 338, nor "...proved the individuality of handwriting." on page 312.

Two cited references, Kam et al. (1994) and Wetstein et al. (1994), are in fact the same article; the authors' names have been transposed. Two other cited references, Hilton (1995) and Hilton (1958), are in fact the same article; the 1995 article is a reprint of the 1958 article.

For the other pedants, there are a few typos: a misspelling on pages 39 and 42; an incomplete indentation of a direct quote on pages 123 and 124; and an inconsistent format of a journal title on page 385.

Despite the shortcomings, this new edition is very good overall. It is a unique resource on forensic handwriting examination that should be on the bookshelf of every forensic document examiner.

References (as they appear in the new edition):

Hilton, O. (1958). The relationship of mathematical probability to the handwriting identification problem. In R. A. Huber (Ed.), *Questioned Documents in Crime Detection: Proceedings*

of the R.C.M.P. Crime Detection Laboratories Seminar no. 5 held at Ottawa, Oct. 27-Nov. 1, 1958 (pp.121-130). Ottawa: Queen's Printer.

Hilton, O. (1995). Relationship of mathematical probability to the handwriting identification problem. *International Journal of Forensic Document Examiners*, 1(3), 224-229.

Kam, M., Wetstein, J., & Conn, R. (1994). Proficiency of professional document examiners in writer identification. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 39(1), 5-14. doi: 10.1520/JFS13565J.

Olkin, I. (1958). *The evaluation of physical evidence and the identity problem by means of statistical probabilities*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, Cleveland, OH.

Srihari, S.N., Cha, S.-H., Arora, H., & Lee, S. (2002). Individuality of handwriting. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 47(4), 1-17.

Wetstein, J., Kam, M., & Conn, R. (1994). Proficiency of professional document examiners in writer identification. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 39(1), 5-14.