U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Criminal Justice Information Services Division

Capturing Legible Fingerprints

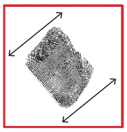
Proper Capture of Image within Fingerprint Block

INCORRECT
Image printed too low in block.

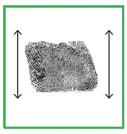
Image protrudes into neighboring fingerprint block.

CORRECT
Entire image printed in the center of the block.

Proper Orientation of Rolled Fingerprint Impressions



INCORRECT
Image captured at an angle.



CORRECT
Capture image in a vertical upright position.

Non-Discernable Images/Smudges

1. Do not apply excessive ink to the fingertip.
2. Do not apply excessive pressure to the fingertip.
3. During capture, turn subject's wrist and simply guide the finger being printed.

Quick Tips

All subjects' hands should be cleaned prior to printing:
- Soap and water are preferred.
- If soap and water are not available, rubbing alcohol may be substituted.

Moist hands:
- Wipe each finger with rubbing alcohol.

Hands with dry or flaky skin:
- Use a small amount of hand lotion and wipe off any residue.

Fine ridge detail:
- Apply a softening agent
- Use "Ridge Builder" – a commercial product often used instead of lotion
- Apply less ink or use less pressure

Instruct the subject to:
- Stand parallel to the work station
- Look away from the inking plate
- Try not to assist you
- Relax and let you do the work

Special Circumstances

Deformed or missing fingers:
If the finger is deformed, every attempt should be made to record the fingerprint in both the rolled and plain impression blocks. A postmortem kit, which is more commonly known as a spoon, can be utilized to assist in recording these images. If unable to record the image, simply place a notation in the fingerprint block (e.g., deformed, webbed) or electronically apply the Unable to Print (UP) code in data field 2.084.

Missing fingers are fingers physically present but cannot be recorded at the time of capture due to injury. Each missing finger should be designated via a notation in the fingerprint block (e.g., bandaged, injured, crippled, paralyzed) or electronically apply the UP code in data field 2.084.

Fully amputated fingers:
An amputated finger occurs when the finger's first joint is no longer physically present. Amputated fingers should be designated via a notation in the fingerprint block (e.g., amp, missing at birth, severed) or electronically apply the Amputated (XX) code in data field 2.084.

Tip-amputated fingers:
If a portion of the first joint is present, record the available fingerprint pattern area in both the rolled and plain impression blocks.

Extra fingers:
When fingerprinting an individual with an extra finger, record only the thumb and the next four fingers. Do not record the extra finger as either a rolled or plain impression.

Scarred fingers:
Record scarred fingers in both the rolled and plain impressions without a notation.

Worn fingerprints:
An individual, by the nature of their work or age, may have very thin or worn ridges in the pattern area. Apply light pressure and use very little ink to record these types of fingerprint impressions. A technique known as "milking the finger" can be used to raise the fingerprint ridges prior to printing. This technique involves applying pressure or rubbing the fingers in a downward motion from palm to fingertip.

White Lines/Cracks/Worn Ridges within Fingerprint Pattern Area

INCORRECT
Indicates dry, rough skin.

Fingerprint ridge detail not visible.

CORRECT
Worn ridge detail may be improved with the following:

1. Ridge Builder
2. Corn Huskers Lotion
3. Lotion with Aloe Vera
4. Massage finger to force blood to fingertips

Roll Fingerprints Nail to Nail*

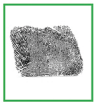
(*These instructions are not applicable if submitting flat impressions only.)

Loop — Whorl

INCORRECT
Deltas need to be present in both the Loop and Whorl patterns.

Delta: the point on a ridge at or nearest the point of divergence of two type lines, and located at or directly in front of the divergence.

Loop — Whorl



CORRECT

1. Roll finger in a smooth continuous motion from nail to nail.
2. Roll thumbs towards subject. Roll fingers away from the subject.
3. Ensure entire first joint of the finger is in constant contact with the card.

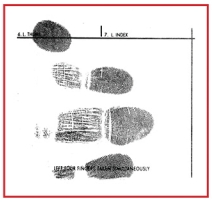
Complete Pattern Area Not Present in Rolled Impressions

INCORRECT

CORRECT

Proper Capture of Plain Fingerprint Impressions

INCORRECT
Image captured horizontally.



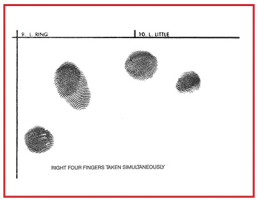
CORRECT
Image captured at an appropriate angle.

Multiple Images

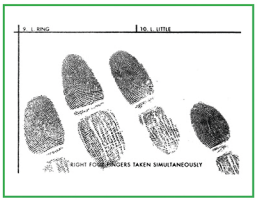
Do not record multiple fingerprint images in a single fingerprint block.

Complete Pattern Area Not Present in Plain Impressions

INCORRECT



CORRECT



Biometric Services Section Customer Service Group (304) 625-5590

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