

# Documenting Photographic Evidence

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Somewhat to my surprise, I could not find a single example of a photographic evidence log that I would be inclined to use at a felony crime scene. During my working career, I generally dictated my notes into a voice-activated recorder for later transcription.

The logs that I can recall seeing all date from the film era when photographers used manual focus and exposure cameras with fixed focal length prime lenses. Some of these film era relics still show up from time to time but they're not necessarily appropriate for auto-everything digital cameras with zoom lenses.

Ideally, police departments will develop their own forms to suit their requirements. Two forms should cover most situations nicely.

A "first shot form" should be filled out and photographed immediately upon arrival at the scene. At a minimum, this form should include:

- Date and time of arrival
- Officer's name and badge number
- Case number
- Nature of the offense
- Location
- Camera make, model and serial number
- Standard zoom lens make, model and serial number
- Macro lens make, model and serial number

This is the first photo that should appear on the memory card to help the technician associate the processed and printed photos with a given case. It will also save writing the same information numerous times on the photo log and in narrative reports.

Film era photo logs required listing the date and time, the ISO rating of the film, the focal length of the lens, etc. This information is now readily obtained from the EXIF file. Listing it on a paper form would appear to be a waste of time. The information that I consider essential on a photo log for the digital era includes:

- JPEG number, starting with the "first shot form" photo.
- The type of shot, such as OA for an overall view, MR for a mid-range view, CU for a closeup view and EQ for an examination-quality photo.
- The subject of the photo or the location from which the picture was taken, preferably named to correspond with the identifiers used in the crime scene diagram.

The log heading should reflect the date, time, case number the name and badge number of the officer, the log page number and the total number of log pages, i.e. 1 of 3, 2 of 3 and so forth.

If the JPEG numbers are listed consecutively without a break and the log page numbers are listed consecutively with the total number of pages listed, a person comparing the photo log to the camera-original digital image archive can be reasonably certain that every photo is accounted for to include the duds and duplicates.

Under no circumstances should an evidence photo ever be deleted. Treat every photo taken at the scene of a crime as evidence. Under no circumstances should an investigator photograph something during the course of an investigation that is not relevant to the investigation and suitable for viewing by supervisors, prosecutors and jurors.

If something interesting but irrelevant catches your eye, use your backup camera or even your smartphone to grab the shot.