

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Criminalistics An Introduction to Forensic Science, Seventh Edition*

REFERENCE: Saferstein R. *Criminalistics An Introduction to Forensic Science, Seventh Ed.*, Prentice Hall, 2001, 576 pp.

The first edition of this book was published in 1977, which means it has been in continuous production for about 24 years. There has to be a reason for such success and I believe that reason is that it fulfills a need for a simple readable text for college and training courses in forensic science. A part of this success is also due to ability to bridge the gap between the science oriented “doer” and the law enforcement “user” of forensic science. This is no small problem and it imposes limitations on the book for both applications. This is the strength of the book in its market place and the weakness of the book for those who wish to use it in one of those two arenas.

The book has 18 chapters covering the earliest forensic topics, fingerprints and toxicology, to the Internet and a look at “The Future.” This is done in 560, very well-illustrated pages. Since the average chapter is 30 pages long, including diagrams and questions, the coverage of each topic is not extensive. With this many topics, inevitably some topics are more adequately covered than others.

When a book has reached its 7th edition, it is unlikely to find any glaring errors and that is the case here. The book covers a lot of territory and covers it quite accurately. The writing style is simple and straight forward.

Certainly some of reason for the book’s success and its ability to bridge the technology gap is due to the author’s frequent use of case readings. They appear throughout the text and in a 30-page section after the end of the main text and before the *Appendices*. These, with the exception of one, are well selected to illustrate the value of physical evidence and make good reading besides. The four-page

excerpt from Bugliosi’s book on the O.J. Simpson Case in the “DNA” chapter is pure television talk show and is an inappropriate reading for a textbook.

This being the 7th edition one would expect the materials to be current and to a large extent this is true. The “Further References” sections are all very current and uniformly good. Several of the chapters have clearly not been updated for this edition. The most obvious are Chapter Nine on “Drugs” which does not appear to have been updated in the last several editions and Chapter Six on “Inorganic Analysis” which has heavy emphasis on NAA and no mention of several methods more commonly used today.

There are an *Instructor’s Manual* and a *Laboratory Manual* available for use in conjunction with the text. The *Instructors Manual* has learning objectives, suggested experiments and demonstrations, and suggested examination questions for each chapter. These materials are well thought out and would certainly prove valuable for an individual new to teaching forensic science. The questions are so closely tied to the material in the book that an instructor presenting supplementary material would have to be careful of which questions are selected. The *Laboratory Manual* is quite extensive with a total of 45 experiments, many of which have multiple parts. They range from quite simple to fairly sophisticated and requiring some specialized equipment. With that many experiments to choose from, most instructors should be able to select a set that would fit their needs and available resources.

In summation, this book has been and will likely continue to be a popular book for forensic science courses at the college, junior college, law enforcement training, and the advanced high school level. The combination of clear writing style, good figures and tables, and frequent case readings make a highly usable text that, if necessary, can be selectively sampled or supplemented to fit the background and needs of the students.