



Linda Hodges works as a forensic document examiner. She compares handwriting samples and studies them to determine if a signature is authentic or not.

CONTRIBUTED

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LINDA HODGES
Forensic document examiner
on why she has always been interested in science

Reading between the lines

Love of science and attention to detail make Hodges feel at home as forensic document examiner

By Christie Barlow
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Most people don't pay much attention to the junk e-mail that shows up in their inbox.

But it's a good thing that Linda Hodges did.

As a child Hodges spent her time taking door handles apart and trying to put them back together. She wanted to figure out how they worked.

"I have to know how everything works," Hodges said. "Science is the unknown, when working with the unknown you have to find stuff out. I think that's the magic of it."

As far back as she can remember, she has always loved science.

She received her degree in electronics and was working as a Web site designer and newsletter editor before she received a career changing e-mail.

Out of the blue, she got an e-mail about becoming a forensic document examiner with a phone number to call for more infor-

mation.

She called, and the job sounded like a fit to her.

Hodges enrolled in the Handwriting Service International two-year apprenticeship program in 2006 and has been working ever since. The program teaches how to analyze handwriting and recognize characteristics forgeries, Hodges said.

Looking at things like the angle, size, shape, and fluidity Hodges can determine whether or not a signature was forged.

"There are certain ticks that people have that no matter how hard they try, they don't go away," Hodges said. "I study their handwriting and know that people have certain quirks."

During the two-year apprenticeship, Hodges is required to review handwriting samples and perform various tests.

A test would involve a list of 10 different writing samples.

Each participant would write

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the same word in two different ways.

The forensic document examiner has to pick which two samples match each participant.

They do so by looking for the small quirks and tells that people have in their handwriting, Hodges said.

“No signature is exactly the same,” Hodges said. “But there are quirks. I’ve written my own name 25 times and it’s always the same length; it’s always the same height.”

Now, six months into her apprenticeship, Hodges has already started working on cases.

With the help of 15-20 other forensic document examiners, Hodges examines wills, marriage licenses, graffiti, threatening letters, forged checks and any other document that someone has signed.

She compares handwriting samples to an alleged forgery and

determines whether or not the signature is legitimate.

“The most interesting thing is looking at the signature and helping people,” Hodges said. “Some people just want to know if you can tell the difference, and other people need to clear their name.”

With identity theft becoming an increasing problem, there is a need for forensic document examiners, Hodges said.

Her goal is to become one of the top examiners in the area.

She wants to testify about important cases in court, but says that she deals largely with wills and forgeries right now.

“It’s exciting,” she said. “Every case is different, so it’s not monotonous. It’s a great career.”

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