

Who's who

Many people are involved in criminal investigations. Different names are given to people who are affected by a crime, and all the different people who help to solve it. This section explains who they all are, what they do – and it shows how scientists get involved.

Victim

All crimes end up hurting someone. That person is described as the victim, whether the crime is a simple theft or a horrendous murder.

Suspect

If the police have a good idea about who committed the crime, that person is called a suspect. Suspects can be arrested and kept in prison for a short time, but they must be treated as if they are innocent until they are proven guilty.

Witness

Anyone who saw or heard something happening that relates to a crime is a witness. They can help the police to work out what happened. Sometimes witnesses can become suspects, especially if they are found to be lying.

Crime scene investigator

Also known as CSIs, these people have the job of checking the scene of a crime for evidence. They take photos and collect samples to send to labs for testing. They do not have to be police officers or scientists, but they can be both.

Police officer

Police officers are in charge of solving a crime. Senior officers called detectives piece together all the evidence. Junior officers guard crime scenes, track down witnesses, and arrest suspects for the detectives to interview.

Forensic scientist

Any scientist who helps the police or a lawyer by examining and testing evidence is doing forensic science work. Some scientists specialize in this kind of work, and are based in crime labs – these are dedicated forensic scientists.

After a suspect is arrested, he or she is put on trial for their crime. Forensic scientists can play an important part here, too. Lots of other people get involved in a trial as well. In some countries, different types of people do some of these jobs.

Defendant

The defendant is the person accused of the crime. In some courts they have a special place to stand called a dock. In others, they sit at a table with their lawyer.

Lawyer

In court, lawyers present evidence to prove that a defendant did or did not commit a crime. In most countries, one team of lawyers – the 'prosecution' team – tries to prove the defendant's guilt. The defendant has a team who argues against them.

Coroner

When a person dies and no one is sure why, a coroner may be called in. He or she works with doctors, lawyers and witnesses in a special trial called an inquest. The coroner decides how a person died, and whether or not it was suspicious.

Expert witness

An expert 'witness' is not someone who saw the crime happening. Instead, it's a scientist or expert who has examined a vital clue to a case. In court, expert witnesses explain to the judge and jury what they discovered, and what this means.

Judge

A judge is the person in charge of the trial. He or she has the power to decide whether or not any evidence presented is solid enough to be used. In some trials, judges also decide on a defendant's guilt or innocence.

Jury

Many trials are presented to a jury of people who do not know anything about the crime. It's their job to listen to the evidence presented by lawyers and witnesses, to weigh all the arguments, and then to decide if the defendant is guilty or not.

CHAPTER 1 Science and law

The word 'forensic' means *to do with the law*. So forensic science means using scientific knowledge and techniques to help with a criminal investigation, especially in a trial. But most people use it to mean *science that solves crimes*.

Every day, forensic scientists are hard at work in dedicated crime labs. They use tests to analyze evidence from crime scenes. If the tests they use reveal anything useful about a criminal case, the same scientists are often also called upon to be

expert witnesses in a trial. They will explain what the test results mean. This can make all the difference in proving whether a person is guilty or innocent.

Pieces of you

Stop reading for a second, and take a look down at the floor. Can you see anything there? If you were able to look really closely, you would find little pieces of yourself. Minuscule fragments of your skin, hair and clothes fall off all the time without you noticing. If you know what to look for, you'll see all types of telltale signs that link directly to you, and you only. However hard you might try not to, you leave a unique trace wherever you go.

Now take a good look at yourself. Look under your fingernails, and on the soles of your shoes. Check your pockets, and sniff your clothes. Tiny strands from a carpet might be stuck to you. Some smells from the air might be sticking to your hair and clothes.

Everywhere you go, you always leave some traces of yourself behind, and in turn you always pick up some traces of the places you've been to – and of the people you've brushed against. Normally these traces are not at all interesting, but when a crime is committed, they become vital clues. These tiny traces may be able to tell who committed the crime, when and even how.

FORENSIC FACT

Everyday objects are full of clues that can be linked to a specific person. Some of them have more obvious clues than others.



Telephones show you the last numbers called.



Cards in a wallet can reveal the identity of the owner.



Dirt and litter stuck to a shoe show where a person has just been.



The owner of this piece of litter might have drink stains on their clothes.