

CRIME SCENE
SKETCHING

A crime scene sketch is a permanent record of the crime scene and the evidence held within it, and it can be drawn from two different perspectives. The most common way to sketch a crime scene is to draw from a perspective above the evidence using a “bird’s eye” or *overhead view*. Although this method allows one to record the size and distance between objects, it does not include the appearance of the walls or other vertical surfaces, such as cabinets or bookshelves. The sketch helps clarify the distances among objects in the crime scene that may have been photographed but that lack clarity about the distance between them. The camera position may be indicated in the sketch so to further clarify the relationship between the photography and the sketch. To show the height of items from the floor or to show items of evidence on the walls, a second type of sketch called *elevation or side-view sketch* must be made. One should focus on eliminating all unnecessary detail from the sketch and include only items necessary for locating evidence and establishing the physical parameters of the crime scene.

Before sketching, one should investigate the scene and select two permanent points of reference. These points must be immovable objects of the room or local. All measurements will be made using these as the anchor points. When preparing a rough draft, the dimensions of the space along with the location of these objects will be used to measure the position of all evidence. Once the floor plan of the location is documented, the location of specific items are then measured and recorded. The most common way to search for evidence is to walk around in a circle, starting on the outer edge of the scene and spiraling around to the middle. Furniture, weapons, bodies, blood patterns, and other items of interest should be included on the sketch with the distance from each of the two reference points. It is not necessary to make a drawing of each item. If a gun is found on the floor, for instance, rather than drawing the shape of the gun in the sketch, a letter with a circle around it should be placed in the sketch. The appearance and orientation of these items should be recorded in photographs. Starting with the letter “A” for the first item, each subsequent item is given the next letter in the alphabet. A legend should accompany the sketch that describes each item, symbol, or information contained in the graphics of the sketch.

A sketch is an important part of the crime scene documentation:

- It records the physical facts.
- It helps relate the sequence of events at the scene.
- It establishes the location and relationship of objects and evidence at the scene.
- It is a permanent record of the scene.
- It assists in preparing a written investigative report.
- It is most usually admissible in court.
- It assists in presenting the case in court to the jury.

Two types of sketches are usually made for crime scene documentation: *rough sketches* and *final sketches*. Rough sketches are produced while on the scene, usually during the preliminary crime scene assessment or evaluation to help with the development of a strategic plan for processing evidence. As can be seen in Figure 2-1, the sketch is not done to scale and can be very rough,

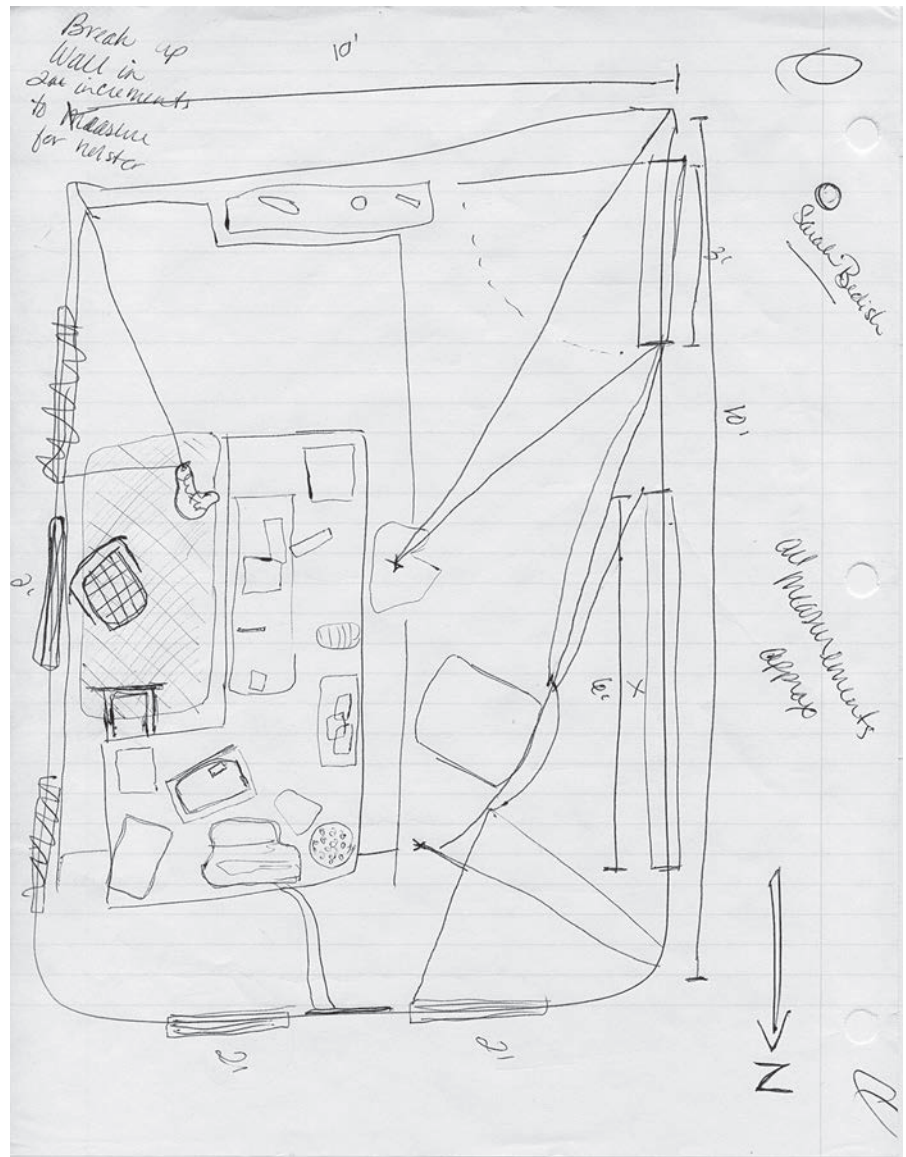


Figure 2-1 Example of a rough sketch.

artistically. As one works through the details of the scene, the sketch will contain the layout and dimension of items and the distance between them. The final sketch, which can be seen in Figure 2-2, is a refined version of the rough draft that is drawn to scale. Only significant items are shown on a final sketch. The final sketch is produced in ink or on a computer. The sketch should be clutter-free and be accompanied by a legend. A legend is a note of explanation, outside the sketch area, which describes items or information contained in the graphic representation of the sketch. A final sketch should include the following:

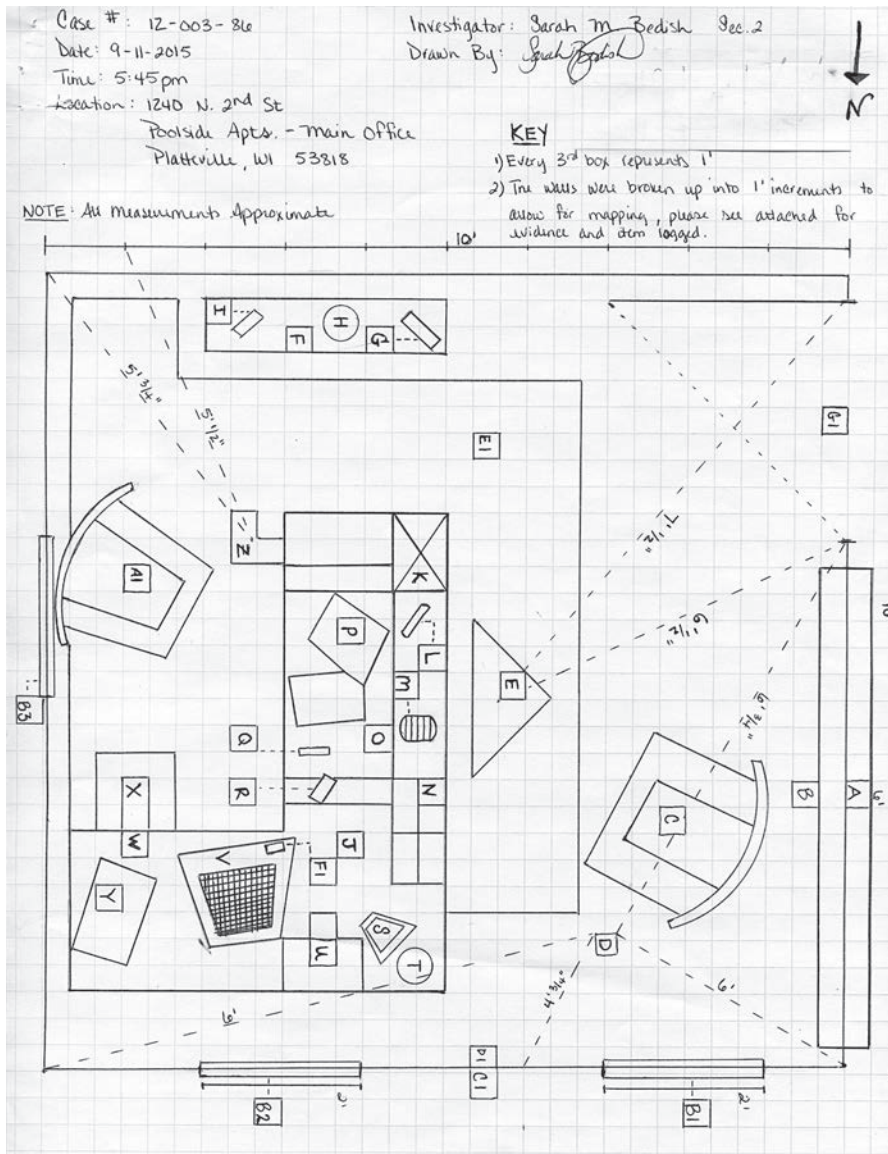


Figure 2-2 Example of a final hand-drawn sketch.

- Title
- Legend/key—what do symbols in the sketch mean?
- Case information—date, time, place, case number
- Initials/name—person who drew sketch
- Indication of direction—north, south, east, west
- Scale—(e.g., 1 inch = 1 foot)
- Notation following scale that all measurements are approximate.

PROCEDURE

Your instructor has set up a mock crime scene and described where to focus your attention.

Rough Sketch of Crime Scene

- Hand-draw a rough, overhead view sketch of the crime scene.
- Record the location of any evidence and include details of its size.
- Measure the length of each wall. Measure the size of furniture and location from fixed points.
- Prepare a header containing case information.
- Prepare a legend that describes what letters and symbols in the sketch represent.

Final Sketch of Crime Scene

- Using the grid-ruled platform provided on the following pages, draw a final sketch of the crime scene making sure that the distances recorded in the rough sketch are proportional.
- Correct any mistakes contained in the rough sketch.
- Prepare a header containing case information.
- Prepare a legend that describes what letters and symbols in the sketch represent.

Final Sketch of Crime Scene

Header:

Case #:

Date:

Time:

Drawn by:

Location:

A large rectangular box with a thin black border, containing ten horizontal lines spaced evenly down the page, intended for a crime scene sketch.

Legend/Key: