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**Best Practice Recommendations for the Verification  
Component in Friction Ridge Examination**



**ASB**  
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## Best Practice Recommendations for the Verification Component in Friction Ridge Examination

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## Foreword

This document has been developed with the objective of improving the quality and consistency of friction ridge examination practices.

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences established the Academy Standards Board (ASB) in 2015 with a vision of safeguarding Justice, Integrity and Fairness through Consensus Based American National Standards. To that end, the ASB develops consensus based forensic standards within a framework accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and provides training to support those standards. ASB values integrity, scientific rigor, openness, due process, collaboration, excellence, diversity and inclusion. ASB is dedicated to developing and making freely accessible the highest quality documentary forensic science consensus Standards, Guidelines, Best Practices, and Technical Reports in a wide range of forensic science disciplines as a service to forensic practitioners and the legal system.

This document was revised, prepared, and finalized as a standard by the Friction Ridge Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Friction Ridge Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for the improvement of this document can be sent to AAFS-ASB Secretariat, [asb@aafs.org](mailto:asb@aafs.org) or 401 N 21st Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904.

All hyperlinks and web addresses shown in this document are current as of the publication date of this standard.

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**Keywords:** *verification, blind verification, open verification, consensus*

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# Best Practice Recommendations for the Verification Component in Friction Ridge Examination

## 1 Scope

This document provides best practice recommendations for conducting the verification phase during friction ridge impression examinations. These recommendations apply to both suitability determinations and resulting conclusions addressing verification considerations (e.g., extent, utility, case type, approach), types of verification and application options, and documentation.

This document does not address technical review.

## 2 Normative References

There are no normative reference documents.

## 3 Terms and Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

### 3.1

#### **blind verification**

A type of verification in which the subsequent examiner(s) has no knowledge of any other examiner's decisions, conclusions or observed data used to support the conclusion.

### 3.2

#### **consensus review**

A type of examination in which a reported decision or conclusion is determined that reflects the collective judgment of a group of examiners

### 3.3

#### **Forensic Service Provider**

#### **FSP**

Organization or individual that conducts and/or supplies forensic services.

### 3.4

#### **nonconforming work**

Work that does not comply with FSP policies and procedures.

### 3.5

#### **open (non-blind) verification**

A type of verification in which the subsequent examiner knows the identity of the other examiner(s) and has access to their decisions, conclusions or observed data used to support their conclusion.

### 3.6

#### **quality assurance measures**

Steps taken by an FSP to detect, correct, minimize and/or prevent nonconforming work.

### 3.7

#### **suitability decision**

#### **utility decision**

A decision made by an examiner in accordance with FSP policy and/or procedure as to whether or not an impression will proceed to the next step in the examination process.

### 3.8

#### **verification (phase of examination method)**

Independent examination by one or more examiners to ascertain if a decision, conclusion, or opinion is reproduced or is in conflict with the decision, conclusion, or opinion of another examiner.

NOTE 1 Verification may be implemented in multiple ways including blind, open, and consensus. The general term verification is inclusive of these various types.

NOTE 2 Verification is a quality assurance measure for friction ridge examination.

NOTE 3 The use of the term “independent” indicates an autonomous examination but not necessarily one without knowledge of a prior decision, conclusion or opinion.

## **4 Recommendations**

**4.1** Verification should be applied to all decisions (e.g., suitability/utility) and examination conclusions<sup>1</sup>. Verification shall be applied to all source identification conclusions.

**4.2** FSPs may choose to verify suitability determinations before the comparison phase of the examination process continues.

**4.3** There are different types of verification available. These types include, but are not limited to, blind verification or open (non-blind) verification. FSPs should balance any advantage of blind verification (for quality control purposes) against the additional time it may require. Therefore, the type of verification used should be determined by the FSP in accordance with their quality assurance measures, stated in the case documentation, and defined in the FSP’s policy and procedures.

**4.3.1** Blind verification should involve a completely independent reapplication and documentation of examination by the subsequent examiner(s). FSPs should have a policy defining the circumstances in which blind verification will be required. At a minimum, blind verification should be used in the following scenarios:

- a) single-identification (or ‘inconclusive with similarities’) ABIS searches to a particular individual;
- b) high-profile cases (due to greater potential for bias);
- c) simultaneity identification based on aggregate (no single impression stands alone for identification); and

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<sup>1</sup> This is not intended to include all individual candidates generated as a result of a database search (e.g., ABIS).

- d) complex impressions or comparisons (low quality, high ambiguity, distortion, etc. as defined by FSP policy).

NOTE 1 Blind verification policies adopted by FSPs should avoid establishing scenarios in which the decisions, conclusions, and opinions of the other examiner can be easily inferred (e.g., a policy which limits blind verification solely to source identifications).

NOTE 2 Access to the original examiner's decisions, conclusions/opinions, and data can occur once the blind verification is completed and documented.

**4.3.2** Open (non-blind) verification should involve an independent reapplication and documentation of examination. Open verification can be used when none of the suggested criteria stated for blind verification are present.

**4.3.3** FSPs should conduct enhanced verification (i.e., blind, multiple, etc.) when a single 'Source Identification' or a single 'Inconclusive with Similarities' conclusion has been drawn to a particular individual after an ABIS search. This is due to the greater risk of error in these types of cases.

**4.4** Consensus review is achieved through independent examination (open or blind) by multiple examiners and subsequent discussion and determination of a consensus opinion. FSPs should have a policy defining the circumstances in which consensus review is required and how the consensus opinion will be reported (e.g. who is responsible for the reported opinion).

**4.5** Contemporaneous documentation of the verification(s) should be included in the case record. This documentation should be commensurate with the complexity level of the examination (e.g., more complex comparisons require more extensive documentation).

## **5 Procedural Recommendations**

**5.1** Determine the appropriate type of verification to be conducted.

**5.1.1** If open, then the verifier receives the original examination documentation including decisions, conclusions and opinions.

**5.1.2** If blind, then the verifier only receives unmarked images of the friction ridge impressions or unmarked original evidence. Any documentation that may introduce bias should not be provided to the verifier.

**5.2** For open verification, the verifier should conduct and document an independent examination prior to reviewing the data originally used to support the reported decisions, conclusions and opinions (e.g., image annotations, bench notes).

**5.3** For blind verification, the verifier should conduct and document an independent examination on unmarked friction ridge impressions.

**5.4** After either open or blind verification, it is necessary to determine if the examiner and verifier support the same decisions, conclusions and opinions. If so, then the verification is complete. If the examiner and verifier came to differing decisions, conclusions or opinions, then the examiner and

verifier enter into conflict resolution (see ANSI/ASB BPR 142, *Best Practice Recommendations for the Resolution of Conflicts in Friction Ridge Examination*<sup>2</sup>).

**5.5** For consensus reviews, all decisions and conclusions of each examiner contributing to the consensus discussion should be recorded in the case file.

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<sup>2</sup> Available from: <https://www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board>





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