

Protect Your Identity: Make Your Signature Forgery-Proof

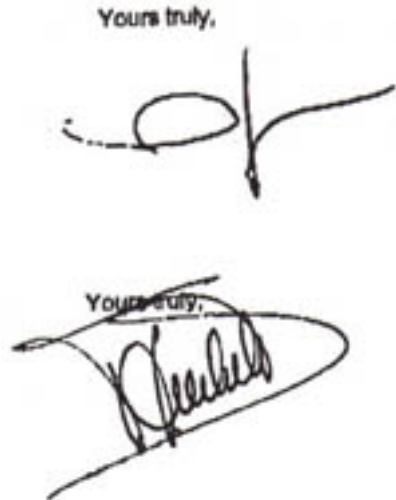
By Thom Grogan
Forensic Document Examiner

And Taylor Morgan
Program Administrator,
School of Forensic Document Examination

Identity Theft has been in the headlines frequently in recent months. As the crime becomes more prolific and widespread, what can you do to protect yourself?

One of the most important elements is your signature. Your signature is still the legal authorization required on documents; therefore, one of the essential things you can do to prevent identity theft and fraud is to make your signature forgery-proof.

Forgery is difficult because no two people write alike. It is impossible to duplicate the subconscious habits of another writer. A forger will tend to draw, rather than write, a signature. A trained forensic document examiner can identify forgery, in part, because of natural tremors that show up under microscopic examination.



Your signature is easily forged if:

- You over-simplify it (what I call "doctor's handwriting")
- You write slowly
- Your signature varies widely from one signing to the next
- You have a low skill level

The best way to make your signature forgery-proof is to make your signature consistent, and complex. The complexity of a signature is measured by how

many times the lines cross one another. When possible, write using long strokes and change the direction. The more illegible the writing, the more difficult it is to forge.

Use the same signature for signing all legal documents, as well as the same kind of pen and ink. If you write a lot of checks, gel based ink is best to defend against "check washing." Practice your signature until you become skilled at signing it rapidly, and stylize your writing until it is difficult to imitate.

It is also advisable to have more than one signature: the one you use for correspondence, and one you use for signing legal documents.

Remember, any unique style you can introduce to your signature to individualize it, will make it easier to prove your case, should you be the victim of forgery or identity theft.

(For more information about Thomas Grogan's seminars regarding proactive ways to combat forgery, identity theft and various forms of fraud; contact him at 704-726-1396)

Published in Handwriting University newsletter April 14, 2005