



CHECKLIST FOR HOMICIDE DETECTIVES & THEIR SUPERVISORS

Derived from:
*“Homicide: Guidelines for Conducting
Homicide Investigations,
by Detectives, for Detectives.”*

HOMICIDE GUIDELINES WORKING GROUP (HGWG)



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By

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Preface

The Homicide Guidelines Working Group (HGWG) was formed as a voluntary group of active and retired homicide detectives from eight different states with the goal in mind to produce a set of guidelines for homicide detectives that would contribute to increasing clearances and help make those detectives and supervisors better at what they do. After fifteen months of research, regular meetings/discussions, and a peer review of the final product, the “Homicide: Guidelines for Conducting Homicide Investigations, by Detectives, for Detectives” was published.

In the appendices of this manual are checklists for detectives and their supervisors in a smaller format, while here they are presented in a standard 8.5 by 11 size that can be readily copied and inserted into a case file or murder book for utilization.

Detective Checklist

Please note that while the list is rather lengthy, it is by no means all inclusive. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the design of this manual with guidelines and associated checklists is intended for those who are working homicide cases from within the 16,000 plus smaller agencies that exist in this country. And particularly for the younger detectives who are just getting acquainted with the homicide investigation process.

This is just a guide, a step-by-step process of how homicide investigations should be conducted. Some of the items listed in the checklist may not apply to you and your investigation and if they do not, just disregard those items and move on accordingly. When in doubt about the applicability of the checklist item, please refer back to the manual for an explanation.

Keep in mind that the jurisdictions in our medicolegal system are divided into Coroners and Medical Examiners (ME) where many MEs are Board Certified Forensic Pathologists who know and already practice the procedures we suggest. On the other hand, there are jurisdictions where that caliber of pathologist may not exist due to the legal system, or adequate funding, so it then behooves the homicide detective to be prepared to perform more functions at the autopsy and/or ensure that all the appropriate evidence is documented and collected properly.

Remember, the new and less experienced detectives should view these guidelines as a roadmap to success, things to do that will create a more thorough investigation. As an experienced detective they should serve only as a “reminder” as to the steps that are needed or to alert them to things that you do not want to miss.

Supervisors Checklist

Following the detective checklist is the Supervisors guide to reviewing ongoing homicide investigations. This is a one page document that all case reviewers can use as a guide to ensure investigative steps are accomplished and that the case detective remains on track to successfully resolve the investigation. It will help to bridge the gap between the experienced and the inexperienced reviewers and their detectives.

Detective Checklist		
✓	#	Guidelines
Chapter I – Section B: General considerations		
	1	Homicide typologies
	2	Crime scene staging
	3	Equivocal deaths
Chapter II – Notifications, arrival at the scene, co-ordinations		
	4	911 calls, dispatch
	5	Arriving at the scene
	6	Suspect at the scene
	7	Assume command of the scene
	8	Determine scope of the investigation
	9	Surviving victims
	10	Interviews at the scene and beyond
	11	Coordinate with first responders
	12	Crime scene unit
	13	Coroner/Medical Examiner
	14	Coordinate with prosecutor
	15	Other agencies as needed
Chapter III – The death scene & Preliminary Investigation, Section A: General considerations		
	16	Define the limits and secure
	17	Establish safe points for entry/exit
	18	Secure location for CSI equipment
	19	Designate staging areas
	20	Designate media location
	21	Conduct initial walk through of the scene
	22	Identify and safeguard fragile evidence
	23	Obtain positioning photographs
	24	Obtain search warrants as needed
	25	Secure digital items
	26	Locate any security cameras
	27	Ensure CSI understands the process/crime
	28	Ask CSI to refute or confirm circumstances

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Chapter III – Section B: Detective actions when CSI is not responding		
	29	Obtain still photographs to include overall before evidence tents are placed; 360 degrees; document presence and lack of evidence and establishing with close up shots.
	30	Obtain photos of all victims to include entire body; head for identification and establishment and close ups of all injuries.
	31	Prepare crime scene sketches
	32	Obtain video coverage of the entire scene
	33	Secure and collect all evidence
	34	Search for additional evidence elsewhere
	35	Body removed, search again for evidence.
Chapter III – Section C: Detective actions in all cases, with or without CSI unit		
	36	Take thorough notes
	37	Prepare a photo log
	38	Obtain meticulous notes about the victim
	39	Note victim's final resting position
	40	Note physiological changes
	41	Note clothing condition
	42	Presence or lack of jewelry
	43	Presence or lack of injuries
	44	Note items that could have caused injuries
	45	Obtain preliminary report from Coroner/ME
	46	Document manner, injuries and whether the body has been moved since death.
	47	Schedule debriefing to release scene
Chapter III – Section D: Detective actions at outdoor scenes		
	48	Establish double perimeter around scene
	49	Crime scene – murder site or dump site
	50	Modes of transportation in/out of scene area
	51	Consider specialized equipment e.g. drones
	52	Collect fragile evidence
	53	Determine status of decomposition of victim
	54	Were there efforts to disguise or hide body?
	55	Was the body posed or manipulated?
	56	Were there any postmortem injuries?
	57	Was the body dressed appropriately for the scene area?

Detective Checklist		
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Chapter IV – Investigative Interviewing, Section A: Information about all witnesses		
	58	Interview 911 caller(s)
	59	Debrief all first responders
	60	Interview witnesses of the crime
	61	Identify those who knew victim
	62	Identify who discovered the victim
	63	Identify who saw victim last alive
	64	Prepare to canvass the neighborhood
	65	Identify potential perpetrator(s)
	66	Separate witnesses based on status, general versus critical or person(s) of interest.
	67	Determine proper location for interview
	68	Document the interview
	69	Fully ID witnesses and their relationship
	70	Elicit background information
	71	Do biases or loyalties exist
	72	Identify their knowledge level
	73	Determine how they became a witness
	74	Were any conversations recorded by them
	75	Were there witnesses to these other conversations?
	76	Use information from general knowledge witnesses to develop victimology or suspectology assessments.
	77	Search for additional witnesses
	78	Record these interviews as appropriate
	79	Use open ended questions!
Chapter IV – Section B: The Neighborhood Canvass.		
	80	Identify area to be canvassed
	81	Develop a list of questions relative to the case, consider scene, victimology & suspectology
	82	Ensure all officers cover the same material
	83	Consider delivery people, maintenance, etc.
	84	Fully document canvass interviews
	85	Identify persons not present for canvass
	86	Schedule follow up of those not there
	87	Expand canvass area as needed
	88	Re-canvass as needed same time and day of incident

Detective Checklist		
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Chapter IV – Section C: Interviews of critical witnesses		
	89	Identify critical witnesses
	90	Were they participants in the crime?
	91	Identify those with personal knowledge
	92	Locate others who may become critical
	93	Locate secure/separate location for interview
	94	Move discreetly as needed
	95	Interview location/room – free of distractions
	96	Interview recorded, audio/video
	97	Recording device activated prior to entering the room
	98	Place recording device in plain sight of person being interviewed
	99	Conduct formal introductions of all persons in the room
	100	Build a rapport with the interviewee through general discussions
	101	Gauge persons level of cooperation and truthfulness
	102	Identify concerns that may cause the interviewee to alter their statement
	103	Conduct interview with two detectives
	104	One detective asks questions, the other takes notes
	105	Consistently monitor the demeanor and cooperation of the interviewee
	106	Recording eliminates the need for contemporaneous notes
	107	Utilize notes as a reminder to the detective to address or re-address unresolved or unexplained issues
Chapter IV – Section D: Interviews of suspects		
	108	Monitor suspects at all times
	109	Had they been previously spoken to?
	110	Who spoke to them?
	111	Was it an “in-custody” situation?
	112	Had the suspect been “Mirandized”?
	113	When in doubt, advise of Rights.
	114	When transporting suspect, ensure no one talks to suspect
	115	Interview suspects individually
	116	Advise they are being recorded
	117	Execute a signed Miranda Warning
	118	Ask opened ended questions and do not interrupt them
	119	Build and maintain rapport
	120	Clarify any statements that appear to be false, incomplete, unreasonable or contrary to known facts.

Detective Checklist		
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Chapter V – Section A: Victimology assessment		
	121	Get to know the victim in context of family, social and work
	122	Was the victim single, married or divorced?
	123	Family person or engaged in multiple relationships
	124	Was the victim involved in a secretive relationship?
	125	Highly religious or highly political
	126	Determine education level
	127	Did the victim engage in any unlawful activity
	128	Did the victim live beyond their means?
	129	Was the victim targeted?
	130	Was the victim just in the wrong place at the wrong time?
	131	Were there any health or mental issues?
	132	Any signs of alcohol or drug abuse?
	133	Identify the victims inner and outer circle of friends
	134	Did the victim access dating or social media sites?
	135	Identify and interview from associates the victim's personality; extroverted/introverted; hobbies, temperament, etc.
	136	Did the victim help strangers?
	137	Has the victim been victimized of a crime before?
	138	Did the victim receive any threats?
	139	Were there any particularly stressful events just prior to this incident?
	140	What is the victim's risk factor: low, medium or high?
	141	Create a baseline of victim's activities from at least 72 hours prior
	142	Who benefitted the most from the victim's death?
	143	Any conflicts with other people?
	144	Who had last contact with the victim prior to the death?
	145	Consider why this victim over all others
	146	Consider why the crime was committed in this location versus others
	147	Consider type of approach, weapon and wounds involved.
	148	Does the victim live or work in a high crime area?
	149	Determine type of employment
	150	Determine if this was a crime of passion, impulse or spontaneity
	151	Identify and interview most recent associates and contacts
	152	Determine the extent of those relationships; naïve, reckless or negligent
	153	Determine if the victim may have contributed to their victimization
	154	Was the crime scene staged?

Detective Checklist		
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Chapter V – Section B: Suspectology assessments		
	155	Identify events that occurred before, during and after the crime
	156	Identify unanticipated reactions from drugs or alcohol
	157	Was the crime interrupted?
	158	Did the victim alert others?
	159	Was the offender injured?
	160	Risk factors for the offender: low, medium or high
	161	Did suspect leave behind evidence
	162	Was the crime planned or spontaneous?
	163	Did the offender have to change or improvise their plan?
	164	Did the offender have contact with LE after the crime?
Chapter VI – Section: Forensic science, general guidelines		
	165	Verify that a crime has occurred
	166	Determine the Modus Operandi (MO)
	167	Use evidence to eliminate as well as identify suspects
	168	Physiological changes of the body
	169	Ante-, versus post-mortem injuries
	170	State of dress or undress of the victim
	171	Was the clothing torn or disheveled?
	172	Use forensic techniques to ID the body
Chapter VI – Section B: Forensic science at the scene		
	173	Examine all tools/weapons that may have been used in the crime - DNA
	174	Search for fragile evidence such as hair or fibers
	175	Collect, safeguard and initiate chain of custody of all items
	176	Determine points of entry/exit – process for evidence
	177	Search for items either taken from or added to the scene
	178	Search waste bins, inside cabinets, ashtrays, etc.
	179	Search for soil deposits, glass or glass particles, pollen or fibers
	180	Examine all vehicles possibly related to crime
	181	Examine all medications
	182	Identify all stains and bodily fluids for DNA
	183	Examine partially eaten food
	184	Identify the presence of hair or tissue
	185	Locate and examine any fingerprints, palmprints or footprints
	186	Locate and examine any tool marks, tire tracks or bullet holes
	187	Are there any blood patterns?
	188	Are blood distribution patterns consistent or inconsistent?

Detective Checklist		
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Chapter VI – Section C: The Crime Lab		
	189	Prepare an evidence matrix or list with forensic value
	190	Identify items that have probative value to the investigation
	191	Communicate with the crime lab to ensure success
	192	Determine items that are suitable for testing
	193	Ensure that you understand the contents of lab reports
	194	Ensure that all items were examined
	195	Is the lab able to exchange and compare DNA profiles with state and federal agencies' data bases?
	196	Reaffirm that DNA profiles have been entered into the appropriate data bases and that no hits have been realized to date.
	197	A CODIS hit does not necessarily confirm guilt. Corroborating evidence must be obtained to confirm the perpetrator.
	198	Determine the possibility for multiple persons mixture
	199	Was sample too degraded?
	200	With no CODIS hit, determine feasibility to use Familial DNA
	201	Is Investigative/Forensic Genealogy a viable investigative process?
	202	If so, proceed accordingly.
Chapter VII – Autopsies. Section A: General Guidelines		
	203	Understand and know medical information
	204	Understand the difference between a clinical pathologist and a Board Certified Forensic Pathologist.
	205	Attend all autopsies
	206	Discuss with pathologist details of the scene - Evidence, photographs, etc.
	207	Understand cause of death and manner of death
	208	Understand the criteria for an “undetermined” death
	209	Determine ID of the victim
	210	Identify the cause of death
	211	Identify the manner of death
	212	Preserve evidence associated with the body
	213	Determine approximate time of death
Chapter VII – Section B: Detective Actions at the Autopsy		
	214	Ensure the entire autopsy process is fully documented
	215	Are medical or dental records of victim(s) needed for ID?
	216	As needed, bring other equipment to the autopsy: fingerprint kits, UV or alternate light source, sexual assault kit, etc.

Detective Checklist		
✓	#	Guidelines
Chapter VII – Section B: Actions that should be performed during an autopsy – cont.		
	217	Utilize full body or localized x-rays (or MRIs) as needed
	218	Wear personal protective gear while attending
	219	Ask to obtain photographs of key elements such as evidence, injuries or other important items.
	220	Obtain photographs of the entire body to include areas of non-injury to validate the status of the body at autopsy. With clothes on and undressed.
	221	Photograph wounds before and after being cleaned.
	222	Photograph injuries close up with and without a scale.
	223	Ensure photographs of injuries reflect their relationship to clothing and the anatomic region of the body.
	224	Take comprehensive notes to include person(s) attending the autopsy
	225	Understand the difference between presumptive identification and positive identification.
	226	How was the victim identified?
	227	Conduct and document a full examination of the body prior to the autopsy or as part of the initial examination by the pathologist.
	228	Utilize alternate light sources for trace evidence such as blood, bodily fluids, bruising, etc. before and after removing clothing.
	229	Search for marks or prints left on the clothing or body by a suspect
	230	Examine hands for injuries or the lack thereof
	231	Examine clothing near the hands for gunshot residue and trace material
	232	Scrape under the fingernails and obtain clip samples
	233	Major case prints obtained?
	234	Photograph clothing in place, then remove one item at a time
	235	Document any tears or defects in clothing
	236	Once clothing is removed, prior to washing, examine the body for trace evidence
	237	Document tattoos, birthmarks, bruises and possible injuries
	238	Search the body with an alternate light source for trace evidence
	239	Repeat the process after the body has been washed
	240	Examine the body for signs of sexual assault
	241	Is the body the victim or the assailant?
	242	Collect all sexual assault evidence as dictated by department policy

Detective Checklist		
✓	#	Guidelines
Chapter VII – Section B: Actions that should be performed during an autopsy – cont.		
	243	During the internal examination of the body photograph all injuries
	244	Seize all evidence such as bullets, fragments, knife blades, etc.
	245	Utilize probes to illustrate wound tracks and photograph accordingly
	246	With severed bodies, request all the parts be rearticulated
	247	Collect DNA samples and photograph the process
	248	Determine which substances the pathologist will screen for
	249	Request toxicology screen for all substances you suspect may be involved
	250	At the end, determine the preliminary cause and manner of death
	251	Arrange for a copy of the autopsy and toxicology reports
Chapter VIII : Legal considerations, search warrants & subpoenas		
	252	Identify areas where a search warrant may be needed
	253	Coordinate with prosecutor
	254	Collect the data and prepare affidavits
	255	Consider the possibility there are multiple sites to include: assault site, murder site, dumping site and/or modes of transportation
	256	Identify all digital media devices for seizure and exploitation
	257	Identify all possible modes of transportation
	258	Identify all cellular towers
	259	Geofence warrants: Identify specific area starting w/the death scene
	260	Keep area small but expand as necessary
	261	Reverse Google search warrants: identify search terms, address of the death scene, name of victim, family, and others as needed.
	262	When residence of victim is different than scene, collect data and proceed accordingly to confiscate all items with evidentiary value.
	263	Same for suspect(s) residences
	264	Social media sites of both the victim and the suspect(s)
	265	After the search, delineate all items seized.
	266	Secure the items of evidence per evidentiary protocols
	267	Share information with the appropriate people
	268	Subpoenas: financial records and other personal records of both victim and suspect(s)

Detective Checklist		
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Chapter IX – Technology, Section A: General guidelines and Cell Phones		
	269	Ensure that legal authority exists to seize items
	270	Locate and secure all digital devices at the scene
	271	Separate them as to victim or suspect(s) devices
	272	Safeguard for latent prints, DNA, bodily fluids or trace evidence
	273	Document locations from which items were seized
	274	Cell phones: do not allow IOS device to power off or battery to drain.
	275	Document any changes to the device or if it reboots or power downs
	276	Turn phones to Airplane mode and place in a faraday bag.
	277	Preserve all contents: emails, text messages, geo-location data, cloud
	278	Identify locations of cell towers that exist near areas of interest
	279	Do any devices have a fingerprint reader used to unlock device?
	280	Ensure that search warrants include all computers, laptops and tablets and the contents therein.
	281	Was there any paring of devices? Safeguard data accordingly.
Chapter IX – Technology, Section B: social media, computers and others		
	282	Identify all social media accounts connected to the parties involved
	283	Examine them for evidence and leads
	283	Do any devices have geo-location data?
	285	Secure accordingly and track the movements of the parties involved.
	286	Identify any device that is capable of creating or sorting information electronically
	287	Identify any peripheral device that might facilitate the processing of information
	288	Identify any magnetic or electronic storing devices, CDs, DVDs, etc.
	289	Identify any keys or encryption devices that are necessary to gain access
	290	Identify and collect as needed all software related items for evaluation
	291	Determine content on the computer and examine accordingly.
	292	Identify any caller ID or voice message systems
	293	Search for cameras, indoor and outside that may recorded activities
	294	Utilize facial recognition software where feasible
	295	Have any police cars with Automatic License Plate Recognition been in the area before, during, or after the crime that may have recorded evidence?
	296	Identify the utilization of transponders such as “Easy passes”

[illegible]

Supervisors Guide to Reviewing Homicide Investigations

In the Review of the Literature of the manual there were two scientific studies that made mention of not only the need for equal/associated training of detectives and first line supervisors, but also that there is proven effectiveness in the quality of the homicide investigations if supervisors regularly review ongoing cases. Therefore, the Supervisors Guide to Reviewing Homicide Investigations was created to guide the supervisor through the process of managing the investigative process.

The research was quite clear that the utilization of a tool such as this supervisor's checklist significantly helped to bridge the gap between inexperienced and experienced case reviewers. This brought the level of the investigation to a much higher standard.

And like with the Detective Checklist, it is not all inclusive, but if the supervisor first becomes familiar with the Detective Checklist, then their responsibility of reviewing ongoing cases becomes much easier by using this guide as their roadmap. It is all about making the system better, saving time, and solving cases.

Supervisors guide to reviewing ongoing homicide investigations

Case Number: _____ Date of Review: _____

Detectives: _____

✓	#	Guidelines
	1	Is the notification fully documented?
	2	Is the initial response documented?
	3	Statement from complainant
	4	Victimology information gathered and assessed
	5	Crime scene properly documented
	6	Evidence collected? Sent to Lab?
	7	Crime lab reports, received and understood
	8	Coroner/ME reports, received and understood
	9	Critical witnesses identified, interviewed and statements obtained
	10	Canvass results – not completed revisit
	11	Hypotheses as to what happened – verified
	12	Suspect development (MOM) Statements
	13	Pre crime, crime and post crime behavior evaluated
	14	Undeveloped leads - management
	15	Reconstruction needed? Validate hypotheses.
	16	Prosecutor briefed; feedback

NOTES: