

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

The Homicide Guidelines Working Group (HGWG)

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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 | | |
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| 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 | Corner/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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| Detective Checklist | | |
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| ✓ | # | Guidelines |
| 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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| ✓ | # | Guidelines |
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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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| ✓ | # | Guidelines |
| 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 Guidelines | | |
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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 victim's 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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| ✓ | # | Guidelines |
| 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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| ✓ | # | Guidelines |
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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. |
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| Detective Checklist | | |
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| ✓ | # | 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 |
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| Detective Checklist | | |
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| ✓ | # | 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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| ✓ | # | Guidelines |
| 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” |

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 |
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| | | |
| | 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: