



Collecting, Authenticating, & Handling Evidence

SUNY SCI SKILLS WORKSHOP

April 13th, 2026



Disclaimer

This presentation shall not constitute legal advice, nor create an attorney-client relationship. This presentation is for informational purposes only. If you have any specific legal questions or require legal advice for specific situations, please contact or refer to your institutional, general, or outside counsel.



The documents included in the training materials for & referenced in this training are purely fictional.

The case is not based on any real case that the SCI staff is aware of. The characters named are fictional & are not intended to represent any real person.

The details of this case & these documents should not be used to make decisions in similar cases, nor should they be considered precedent or advice from SUNY or the Student Conduct Institute.

Training Materials



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Learning Objectives



Classify various pieces of evidence for organizational and maintenance purposes



Identify pieces of evidence received for a conduct cases as authentic and which are not



Recognize characteristics of possibly inauthentic or falsified pieces of evidence



Analyze testimony or evidence for credibility



Evidence & Your Institution

Frictionless Evidence Collection

- Establish a mechanism for parties/witnesses to submit evidence
- Intake form, process/in-person
- Submit with tech/physical media
- **Tag** evidence whenever possible
- **Keep file size in mind for electronic storage**



Evidence Classification

- Material that supports an assertion
- Establish or refute claims relevant to a case



Types Of Evidence To Collect

Exculpatory

Inculpatory

Direct

Corroborative

Circumstantial

Physical/Real

Testimonial

Documentary

Character

Digital

Exculpatory & Inculpatory Evidence

Exculpatory – tends to clear a respondent or accused student of responsibility

Inculpatory – tends to establish the responsibility of a respondent or accused student

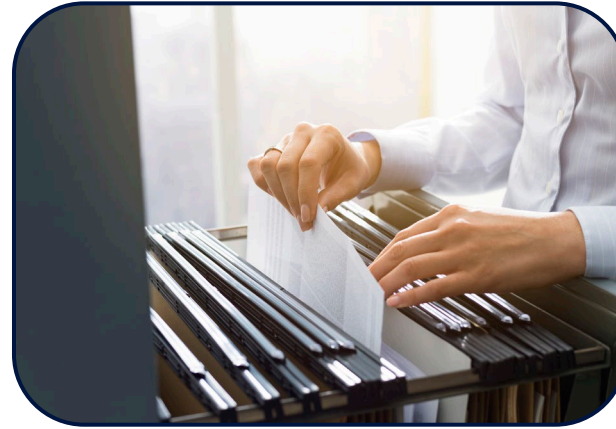


Evidence Weight

Direct	Corraborative	Circumstantial
First-hand observations & evidence of incident or surrounding circumstances CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT (e.g. witness testimony of first-hand account of incident).	Statements or tangible materials that confirm direct evidence regarding incident SOME WEIGHT (e.g. video evidence, text message threads, security footage, swipe card records, business records, medical records).	Statements or tangible materials that rely on inference to connect to a conclusion of fact LEAST WEIGHT (e.g. photo of location of alleged sexual assault showing several empty vodka bottles & solo cups).



TESTIMONIAL

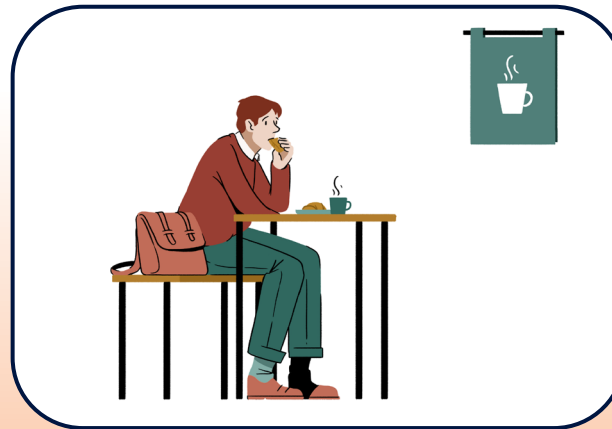


DOCUMENTARY

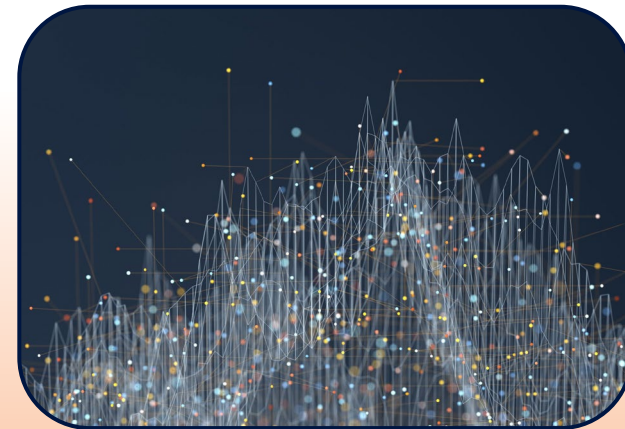


PHYSICAL/REAL

Kinds Of Evidence



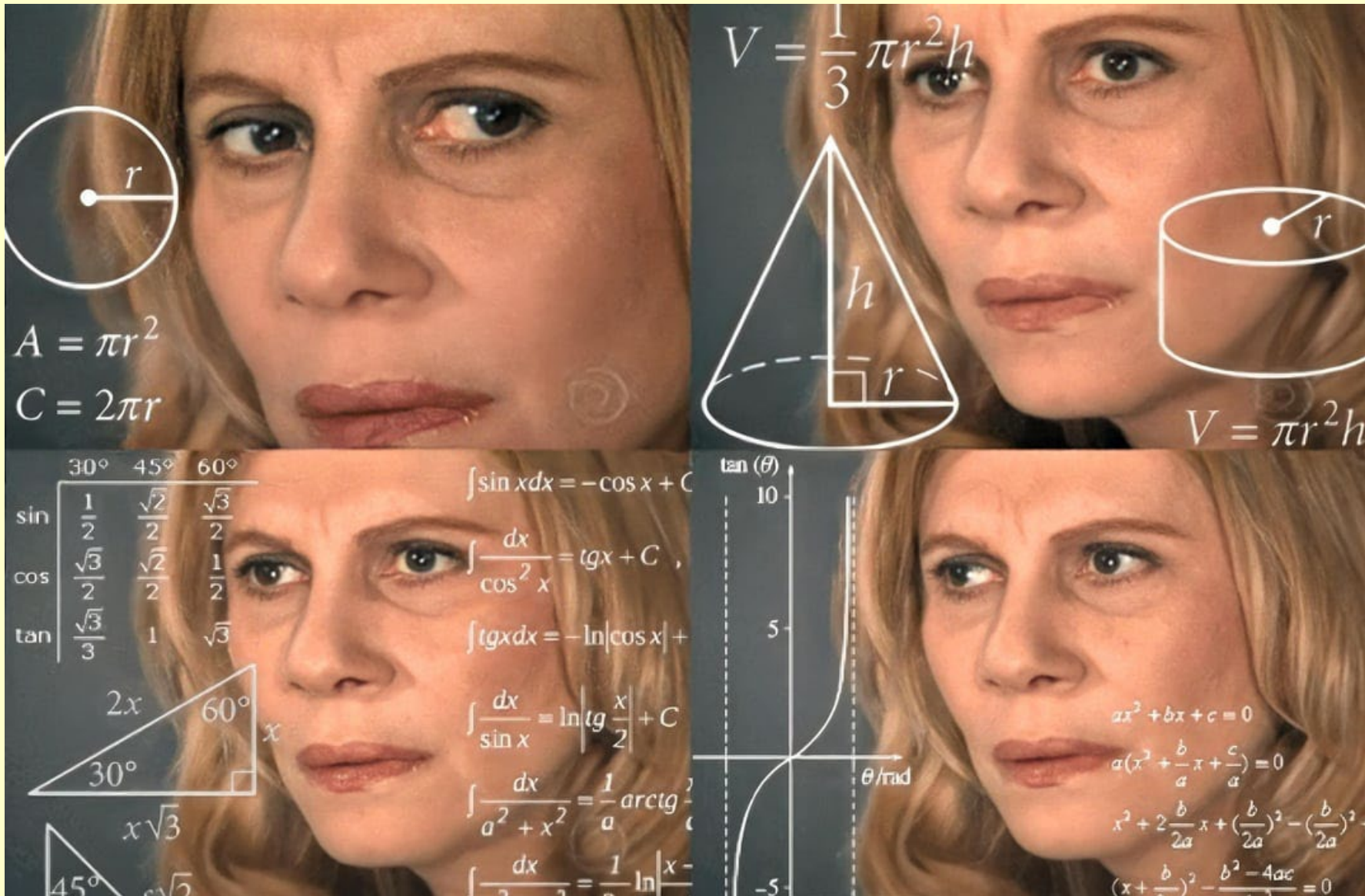
CHARACTER



DIGITAL

Evidence Storage

- Keeping it secure
 - Case-management software*
 - *Password protect folders on servers
 - Physical case files in a locked cabinet
 - Two-factor authentication for access
 - Restrict or allow access
- Retrievable & accessible



Meta Data Crash Course

What is “meta data?”

- Data about data
- Analogy time – SOUP
- Helpful for verification & corroboration



How To Access Meta Data

Easiest methods:

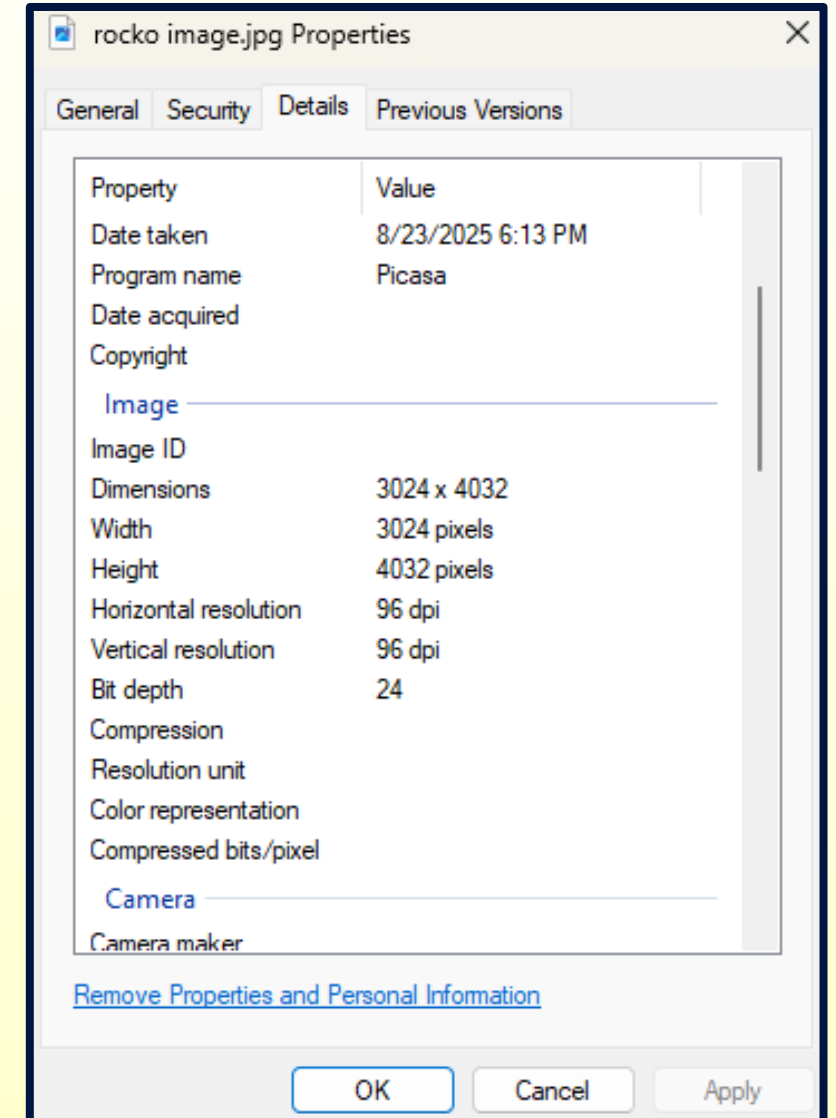
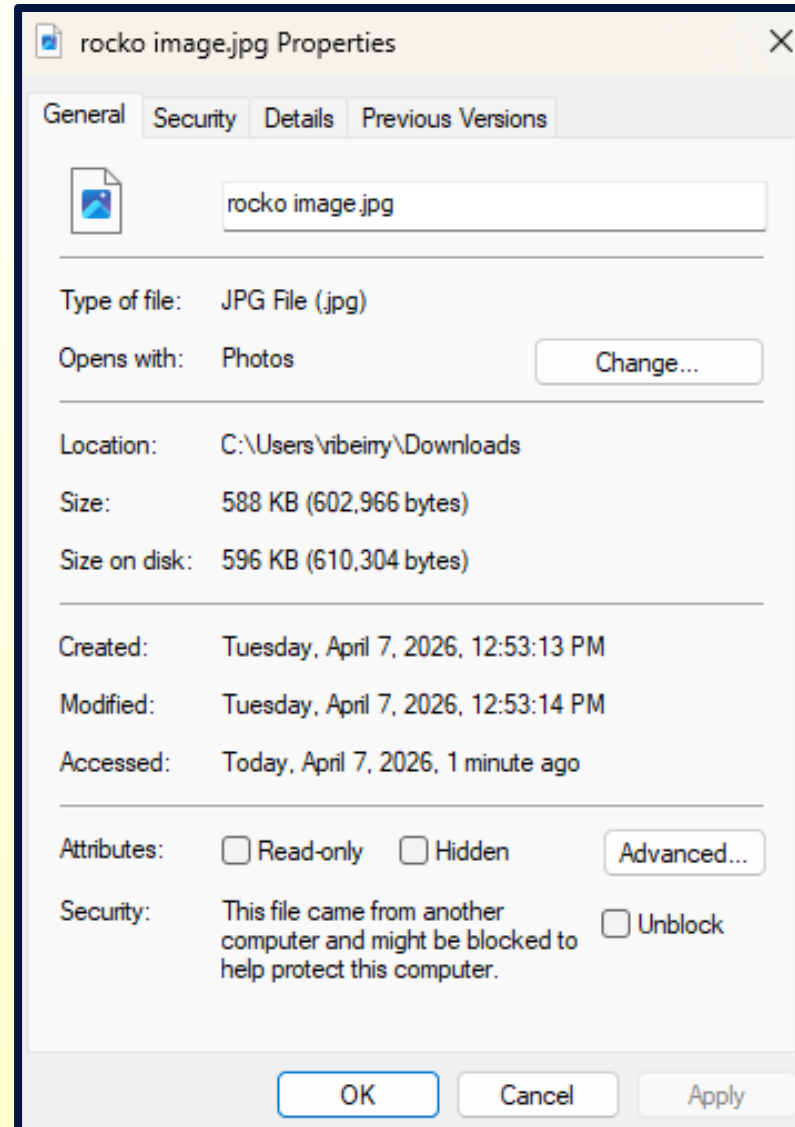
- On Windows: right-click file, select “Properties,” then click “Details”
- On macOS: right-click file, select “Get info”
- Devices: Open photo (or file), tap “I” icon or swipe up
- Websites: right-click page, select “View Page Source” to see meta tags

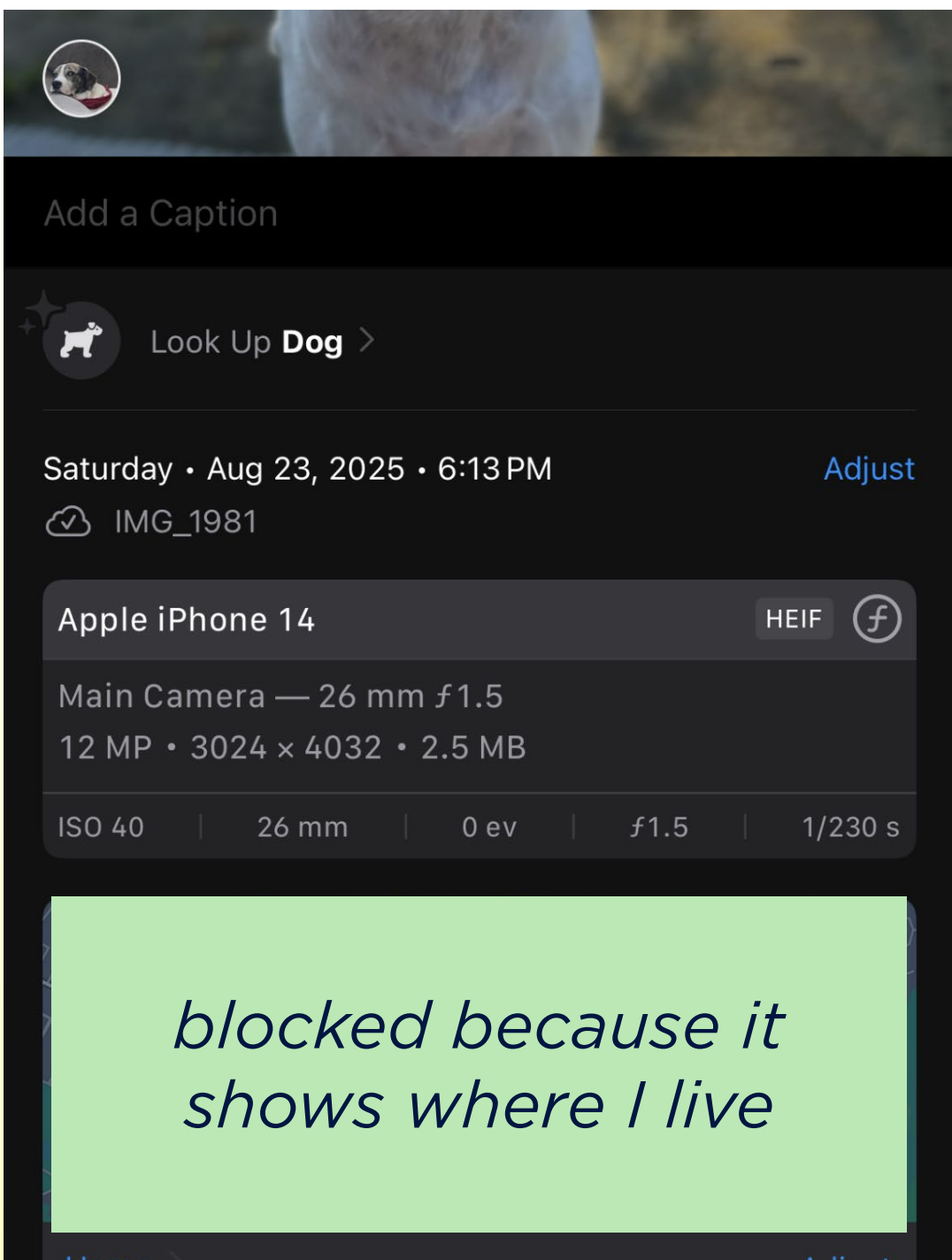
More intensive:

- Use online tools to access more hidden meta data
 - Exifinfo.org
 - Pics.io
 - Metadata2go.com



Meta Data Walkthrough: Part I





Meta Data Walkthrough: Part II

Exif Info: rocko image.jpg



EXIF

Software
Picasa

Exif Version
0220

Date/Time Original
2025:08:23 18:13:48

How To Use Meta Data

- Meta data is NOT automatically “evidence” of an infraction
 - MAY be evidence of: evidence tampering, destruction, intention to mislead
- Helpful verification, corroborative, or authentication tool
- Can be used on all kinds of digital evidence
 - Pictures, screenshots, videos, etc.
- Good practice to always gather meta data, if possible

DO NOT UNDERSTIMATE THE POWER OF THE REVERSE
IMAGE SEARCH



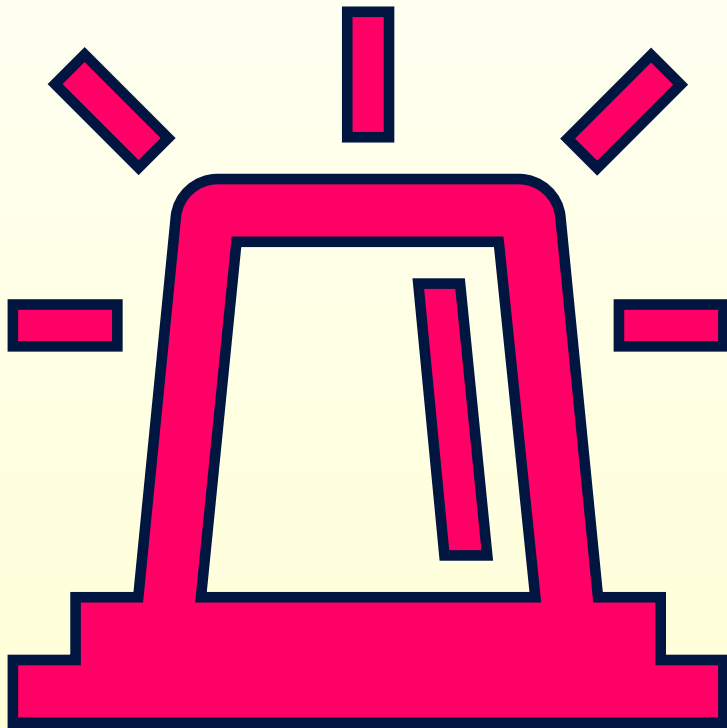
The Reverse Image Search

Reverse image search is a technique to verify authentically generated images:

- Google has been reliable
- TinEye.com can be handy for stock images

Upload or drag-and-drop an image in the search bar
Can identify source of a piece of submitted evidence if someone other than the presumed source

Some Caution



- Meta data may not tell you everything
 - EX: Device used may not belong to parties in case
- As mentioned previously, some the tools mentioned can strip or edit meta data
 - Individuals are entitled to privacy;
editing meta data is not automatically inculpatory
- **All evidence**, including meta data, must be evaluated for weight, credibility, relevance

Authenticating Your Evidence

What is the purpose of authentication?

- This evidence is real
- This evidence is accurate
- Chain of custody is maintained

Prioritize PRIMARY SOURCES



Authentication by Evidence Type

Text/Direct Messages

- Do NOT rely on screenshots
 - Flattens image, unreliable meta data
- Double check all message threads from all accounts

Photo/Video

- What is the source of the evidence?
 - Campus Safety? From parties?
- Are there other parties in the video that would not object to being identified?
- What is the location of the video?
- Is there another source for video or photos in that same location?

Other Sources

- Evidence received from external sources
- Verify those submissions independently
- Consider other methods of authentication:
 - Office letterhead?
 - Receipts?
 - Contact source directly

Ten Key Questions to Build Your Skills!

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What message is the image trying to convey?
3. What elements are in the background & foreground?
4. Who or what are the main subjects of the image?
5. Where did you find or access this image?
6. Who is credited as the source of this image?
7. Can you trust the source?
8. What might be the source's intention behind sharing this image?
9. Who is the intended audience of the image?
10. What accompanying information, like text, comes with the image?



Recognizing Inauthentic Evidence

- Document chain of custody
- Evidence tampering or falsification
- Artificial intelligence (or generative AI)
- Identify “distinctive” characteristics

Chain of Custody

- “Best Evidence Rule” – original documents superior to copy
- Confirms evidence hasn’t been tampered with, source is trustworthy and supported
- Someone must be identified as a “custodian”



Chain of Custody Example

- Officer Bob Ferguson collects marijuana and paraphernalia from Accused Student Stephen Lockjaw and returns to the Campus Safety office. Officer Ferguson weighs the marijuana and determines whether the paraphernalia has been used.
- Officer Ferguson takes pictures of the item with his iPhone, bags the material or disposes of the marijuana, then sends the pictures to Assistant Director of Student Conduct Sergio St. Carlos via a Maxient Incident Report Form with his incident report.
- AD St. Carlos knows that the material was found in the accused student's room, the weight of the material, and what everything looked like. He knows that Officer Ferguson was the person responsible for collecting the material and documenting it.

Why is protecting & documenting the chain of custody important?



Evidence Tampering or Falsification

- Intentional alteration, concealment, falsification, destruction of evidence with the purpose of interfering with an investigation
 - A likely policy violation on its own
 - Affects credibility of the party who submitted or destroyed evidence



Evidence Tampering Example

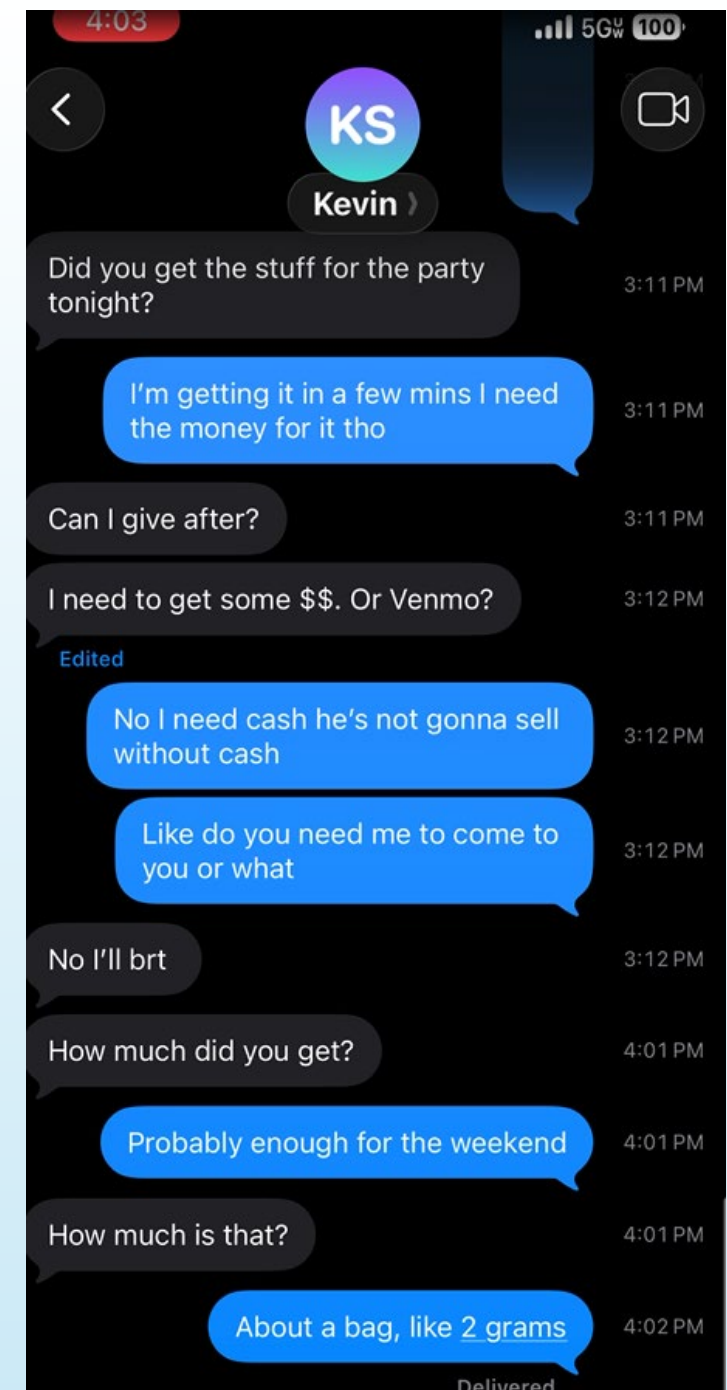
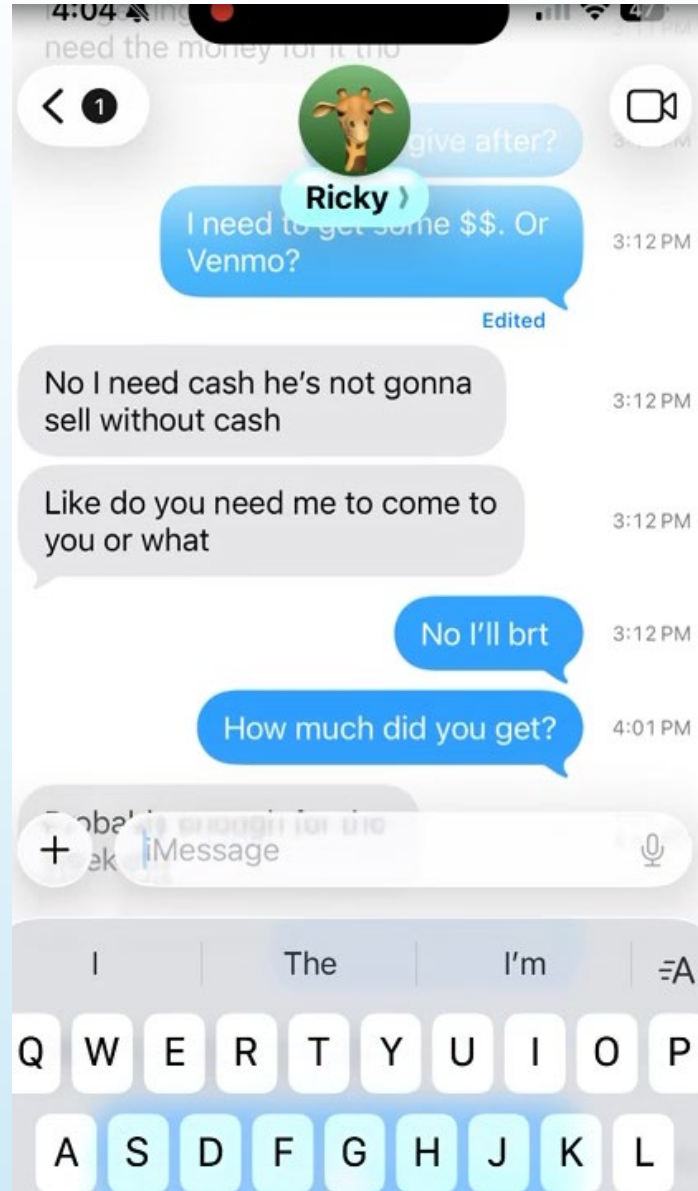
- Student Daniel Kaffee is accused of sending “inappropriate” and possibly harassing text messages to his ex-girlfriend, JoAnne Galloway. The Title IX Investigator, Nathan Jessep, has asked both to submit screenshots of their text threads.
- JoAnne’s text thread seems to have more messages from Daniel Kaffee. Daniel insists that his text screenshots are accurate and that that’s what he has. JoAnne shows Investigator Jessup the time stamps from the text messages, showing that the texts were indeed received from Daniel.

What does this suggest about Daniel’s credibility?



Meta Data Walkthrough: Part III

- Record screen
- Time stamps
- Cross-reference sources



The Use of Artificial Intelligence

- AI Face replacement – retrieve source image; reverse image searches to identify other features of image
- Where is this kind of technique likely used?
- More likely in Title IX and DVSAAS violations, or academic integrity
- Practice the scrutiny of AI photos



Practice Analyzing Your Image Evidence

- Unusual or inconsistent details
- Texture & pattern repetition
- Lighting & shadows
- Background anomalies
- Facial features are confusing
- Contextual errors
- Text & labels
- Digital artifacts
- Emotional inconsistency
- Color grading





AI Quiz: Select the REAL images.

Adapted from [BritannicaEducation.com](https://www.britannica.com/education/britannica-ai-quiz)

Select the REAL image from the following examples.

1. Select the REAL frog. *



☐ Option1



☐ Option2



Evidence Credibility

SPECIFICITY

CONSISTENCY

CONTRADICTION

MOTIVE TO DECEIVE

DEMEANOR & EVASION

QUICK NOTE:

Credibility judgments
may feel subjective

Many traditional
approaches to assess
credibility may
REINFORCE BIASES



SPECIFICITY

- Evidence may identify limited/loads of information
- Narrow & specific information can be helpful or essential

CONSISTENCY

- Consistency with prior statements & evidence
- Corroborate other sources or pieces of information

CONTRADICTION

- Contradictions within or throughout testimony or evidence can reduce credibility
- Stay mindful of “prefect testimony” or “smoking gun” evidence

MOTIVE TO DECEIVE

- Presence of a motivation to deceive?
- What factors determine this
- Conflicts of interest/bias
- Coaching
- Intentional destruction of evidence?

DEMEANOR & EVASION

- Rely on cultural competence when examining body language or demeanor to evaluate credibility
- Behaviors traditionally associated with evasion are not necessarily accurate

- Freddie Heflin is speaking to Ray Donlan, the investigator for a case involving theft from a parked car belonging to another student who lives down the hall, Moe Tilden. Ray Donlan asks Freddie if he knows anything or has seen anything about what occurred, and Freddie says that he “doesn’t even know what Moe’s car looks like.”
- Ray shows Freddie security footage of the parking lot where Moe’s car was broken into from the presumed day of the theft. It shows a person of similar height and build as Freddie smashing a car that was identified as Moe’s car and removing the stereo system.
- Freddie insists that the figure was not him and that the person shown in the footage could be anyone.

Practice Evaluating Evidence - CREDIBILITY



- Freddie Heflin is accused of physically assaulting the student who accused him of theft, Moe Tilden, in his room. Freddie submits a picture of his room as evidence that no physical assault took place, and only some underage alcohol consumption.
- The photo shows Freddie's room furnished normally, with a couple of empty bottles and cans dotting the furniture. None of the furniture is overturned or upset in some way.
- The meta data of the photo suggests that it was taken shortly after the incident was said to have taken place by an iPhone 14, which Freddie owns.

Practice Evaluating Evidence – WEIGHT & RELEVANCE



- Freddie Heflin is accused of physically assaulting the student who accused him of theft, Moe Tilden, in his room. Moe submits X-Rays taken during a visit to a local Emergent Care facility, showing that his right orbital bone was broken.
- Moe's medical appointment was the day after the alleged physical assault. Freddie insists that he didn't see Moe at all on the day of the alleged assault.

Practice Evaluating Evidence – WEIGHT



SECURITY FOOTAGE
ALLEGEDLY SHOWING
FREDDIE STEAL FROM
MOE'S CAR

PHOTO OF FREDDIE'S
ROOM AFTER ALLEGED
PHYSICAL ASSAULT

MOE'S MEDICAL
RECORDS SHOWING A
BROKEN ORBITAL
BONE

NOT RESPONSIBLE

RESPONSIBLE

Let's Weigh the Evidence Together!



TIME FOR AN ATTENDANCE CHECK!!

1. If you are brought to a login page, please sign into your SUNY SCI account using the **local login function**, this should bring you to the attendance check page where you can begin the quiz.
2. Complete the attendance check survey in the **same browser** in which you are accessing this Zoom call.
3. Log into your **SUNY SCI Dashboard**, scroll down to the **My Courses** section, select today's L@D course and choose the **Attendance Checks** module where you can complete the check. 😊
4. If you experience issues, please direct message @StudentConductInstitute in the Zoom chat or email STUDENTCONDUCTINSTITUTE@SUNY.EDU.

**ATTENDANCE QUIZ APPEARS DURING THE TRAINING BREAK *FOR A LIMITED TIME*.
PLEASE TAKE THE QUIZ IMMEDIATELY ONCE IT IS POSTED IN THE CHAT.**