

ist must be based on extensive disputed specimens in which the personal habits are repeated with sufficient regularity to ensure a correct identification. It can be conservatively stated that if the group of potential suspects is virtually unlimited and the work is that of an average or better skilled operator, and today this includes a rather large percentage of the population, investigations to identify a typist generally lead only to qualified results.

When, by other facts peculiar to the investigation, the suspected typist is known to be one of a small group, the task of identifying him from his work becomes simpler, and in general the results are more encouraging. Under these circumstances, regardless of the kind or the commonness of habits, those found in the disputed typewriting and in the work of only one of the group point accusingly toward this individual while completely eliminating the others. In this instance one of a limited group is identified by those habits that in combination are peculiar to him alone. The conditions of the problem have therefore altered the basic probability factors and requirements.

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Identification by Typewriter Ribbon

There are occasions in cases involving typewritten documents in which it is possible to examine the typewriter suspected of writing the document. If the machine is equipped with a single-use film ribbon, and many modern typewriters today are, it can serve as a means of establishing that the machine typed a recent document.

Carbon ribbons consist of a carbon-wax coating on a polyethylene base. The blow of the type striking the ribbon causes most of the coating to be deposited on the paper, leaving a clear outline of the letter on the tape. Since the ribbon passes through the machine only once, there remains a readable outline of every letter typed, and with a properly working ribbon feed, no overlap of the letters occurs. The contents can be read by viewing the ribbon with light behind it or by holding it close to a white background (Figure 11.22).

In machines in which the fresh ribbon is fed from the right, interpretation of the material on the ribbon is not difficult. Spacing must be provided by the reader, but otherwise words read normally and all punctuation is present. Some typewriter ribbons, however, feed from the left, so that all of the words are spelled backward and interpretation is more difficult. Nevertheless, it is possible in either instance to match up the message between the ribbon and the document to establish whether the document was typed on the machine.

In making these examinations additional evidence can be developed if there are typographical errors in the document, even if the errors have been corrected (Figure 11.23). If they were corrected as made, both