

Crawl before you walk: public speaking in preparation for testimony (4 hours)

Testifying in a court of law is often a highly uncomfortable experience for forensic scientists. While they know their subject matter, it is often said public speaking is most peoples' number one fear – even ahead of dying! Given this common and extreme fear, it should be no surprise that people are anxious about getting into the highly charged and adversarial atmosphere of the courtroom and offering themselves as experts.

There are a multitude of classes on how to testify. Some contain general advice, such as how to dress, where to look, and the etiquette of the courtroom. Others focus on specific knowledge needed for a particular forensic discipline. However, for those with a fear of public speaking, they need to learn to crawl before they can walk. Before focusing on the *content* of what they need to say, they need to be able to get up in front of other people and talk generally.

This mini-workshop will provide an introduction to public speaking and techniques commonly used by actors to get more comfortable standing up in front of an audience and commanding attention. We will learn about (and practice) breathing exercises, warm ups, and acting and improv games designed to center participants' energy, get control of their emotions, and prepare them to think on their feet under pressure. Participants should come dressed to move around. We will be creating a space where we can be a little silly, let our guards down, and learn techniques that make it easier to maintain poise under fire – or even under 12 completely benevolent people staring at us while we speak.

Lightning round: a quick tour of advanced topics in latent print testimony (1 hour, 15 minutes)

Since the 2009 NAS report, changes to the expectations of latent print testimony have multiplied. A trend away from dogmatic statements of fact toward transparent statements of data-supported opinion has left many latent print examiners struggling with the transition. This lecture considers some of the tough concepts that come up in court including discriminability, certainty, bias, uniqueness, and the identification decision. It will demonstrate one way to present findings without feeling exposed.

Variability and Foundational Validity – emerging research in latent prints (45 minutes)

Variability on value decisions has been well-documented, but what is the best way to reduce it? A white box study to understand the variables that most influence examiner decision-making has shown shocking levels of disagreement. This lecture describes research to develop a software tool for assigning value to fingerprints that incorporates both human and automated input.

White box studies describe how decisions are made, but black box studies are also needed to establish the foundational validity of the science. This lecture also describes ongoing research to establish a baseline error rate for palm comparisons.

Understanding and Calculating Error Rates in Pattern Evidence (1 hour)

Many “error rate studies” now exist in the literature, but what is an error rate? This lecture will explore different types of error rates, what they mean, how to calculate them, and how to appropriately use them in the courtroom.

Twice Bitten – The Lecture! Latent print perspectives on the PCAST Report (30 minutes)

The recent PCAST report reflected somewhat harshly on many forensic disciplines, but were their arguments entirely without merit? In this lecture, we will describe the main findings of the report, including how latent prints got a “pass”, why many other disciplines did not, and whether it is safe to be resting on our laurels. We will also clarify the report’s usage of the terms “foundational validity” and “validity as applied” and what they mean for your laboratory.

Bio:



Heidi Eldridge has been a latent print examiner for over 12 years. Heidi is a CLPE and Board of Directors member with the IAI, sits on the JFI Editorial Board, and was a member of SWGFAST until its dissolution. She is now a member of the Friction Ridge Subcommittee of the OSAC and Vice-Chair of the Academy Standards Board friction ridge consensus body. Heidi has been teaching latent print testimony for more than 8 years and is a PhD candidate in Forensic Science at the University of Lausanne. After 11 years as a practitioner, she is now a Research Forensic Scientist with RTI International. She also has an undergraduate degree in Speech and Theatre, loves karaoke, and is occasionally accused of a flair for the dramatic.