**Discover Careers in Forensic Science**

Options Abound in Forensics



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So you just finished watching an episode of *Bones* or *CSI* and now you're wondering how you can get in on the forensic science act. Or, better yet, you've developed a passion for problem solving and a love for the natural sciences and the scientific method, and you'd like to find a way to apply that knowledge towards fighting and solving crimes. If this describes you, then a career in [forensic science](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Criminology_Basics/a/Early-History-of-Forensic-Science.htm) will probably be the [perfect criminology career](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Job_Search/a/Finding-The-Perfect-Job-In-Criminology.htm) for you.

The term "[forensic scientist](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/How-to-be-a-forensic-scientist.htm)" does not describe a singular job title, but rather a host of scientific specialties that use their expertise and apply them to legal questions. In fact, "forensics" simply means "of or having to do with questions of law," so that nearly any discipline can be considered "forensic" if it is applied through the solving of crime or the courts.

That's good news, because wherever your interests lie, there is sure to be a discipline that fits you. To help you get a grasp of what sorts of specialties exist, here's list of

some popular and interesting [forensic science careers](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Job_Search/a/Best-Online-Forensic-Science-Job-Search-Sites.htm).

[**1.  Forensic Science Technician**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Career_Profiles/a/Career-Profile-Forensic-Science-Investigator.htm)

Forensic science technicians are the utility players of the forensic science field. They assist in the collection of evidence, conduct analysis and help [investigate crime scenes](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/fl/How-to-Become-a-Crime-Scene-Investigator.htm). Often called crime scene technicians or crime scene investigators, forensic science technicians conduct most of their work either on scene or in a laboratory. They are specially trained in evidence collection and necessarily have an eye for detail. They may also provide assistance to other [forensic scientists](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Glossary/g/Forensic-Scientist.htm) and may serve as a liaison to other specialists. Forensic science technicians can earn between $32,000 and $83,000 per year

[**2.  Bloodstain Pattern Analyst**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Career_Profiles/a/Career-Profile-Bloodstain-Pattern-Analyst.htm)

Popularized by the television series *Dexter*, bloodstain pattern analysts do just what the job title suggests: they analyze patterns in blood to help glean important clues about various crimes. Often referred to as blood spatter experts, [bloodstain pattern analysts](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/How-to-be-a-Bloodstain-Pattern-Analyst.htm) are forensic science technicians who specialize in violent crimes scenes. Through the examination of drips, spills, spatters and stains, they can help determine the type of weapon used, whether or not a struggle occurred, the direction of travel of a victim or suspect, who was the primary aggressor and whether or not wounds were self inflicted. Like other forensic science technicians, bloodstain pattern analysts can earn between $32,000 and $83,000 per year.

[**3.  Forensic Ballistics Expert**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Career_Profiles/a/Career-Profile-Ballistics-Expert.htm)

When detectives need help tracing a bullet back to a gun or identifying the type of firearm used, they call on [forensic ballistics experts.](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/fl/How-to-Be-a-Firearms-and-Ballistics-Expert.htm) These experts in all things related to firearms provide crucial analysis at complex scenes, helping investigators identify the trajectory of fired rounds to find a point of origin. Forensic ballistics experts can identify what type of bullet was used, its caliber and even where it was manufactured. They also have the ability to analyze whether or not a gun was fired recently and also whether or not a particular bullet was fired by a specific gun. Forensic firearms experts can expect to earn between $30,000 and $80,000 per year.

[**4.  Forensic DNA Analyst**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/Career-Profile-DNA-Analyst.htm)

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) analysis is gaining more and more prominence in criminology and forensic science. Because DNA contains the genetic coding that makes us, well, us, it is believed to be able to give an as-close-to-perfect identification as possible, far more accurate even than fingerprinting. DNA analysts compare DNA samples taken from suspects and victims to determine whether or not someone was present at a crime scene, whether they were involved in a violent encounter, and any other question of identity when a sample is available. DNA analysts can also compare unknown samples to databases to identify potential suspects. DNA analysts can expect to earn between $30,000 and $80,000 per year.

[**5.  Polygraph Examiner**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/Polygraph-Examiner-Career-Profile.htm)

Though [polygraphs](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Glossary/g/Polygraph.htm) have limited admissibility in courts, the [polygraph](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Glossary/g/Polygraph.htm) exam remains a useful tool in solving crimes and detecting deception from suspects and witnesses. Polygraph examiners are specially trained to conduct examinations using the "lie detector" and provide analysis of the results. Polygraph examiners undergo lengthy training to hone their skills, and they are often used in internal administrative investigations of law enforcement personnel. Polygraph examiners may work for criminal justice agencies or as private contractors, and their services are quite often employed during the candidate screening process for many sensitive jobs. On average, polygraph examiners may earn around $56,00 per year.

[**6.  Forensic Documents Examiner**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/Questioned-Documents-Examiner.htm)

Forensic - or questioned - documents examiners are used to compare handwriting samples, determine the origin of documents and to detect fraud. They use their expertise to identify forgeries of contracts, checks, bank statements and other documents and electronic records. They can also determine the validity of a signature through handwriting analysis and even find out the relative age of a document. [Forensic documents](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Career_Profiles/tp/Discover-Careers-In-Forensic-Science.01.htm) examiners must undergo an apprenticeship to learn the trade, and may be employed by private contractors or government agencies. Most often, forensic documents examiners assist in "white collar" crimes and work with digital experts and forensic accountants. Salary and earning potential for documents experts can vary widely depending on employer and level of expertise.

[**7.  Digital Forensics Experts and Forensic Computer Investigators**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Career_Profiles/a/Career-Profile-Forensic-Computer-Investigator.htm)

Now more than ever, [digital and computer forensics](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/EducationandTraining/fl/How-to-Become-a-Digital-Forensic-Examiner.htm) is becoming an extremely important and in-demand field. As we use computers and digital devices more and more, criminals are also leaving more clues and electronic fingerprints. In addition, cyber crime is a growing problem, as well as child exploitation and other similar types of criminal behavior that has found a home on line. Forensic computer investigators are trained to collect data from all sorts of places, including damaged and wiped hard drives, cell phones, tablets and other computing devices. The digital evidence they uncover can be essential in successful prosecution of electronic crimes. Forensic computer investigators may work for law enforcement agencies or on a contractual basis, and their earning potential is quite large due to the increasing demand.

[**8.  Forensic Toxicologist**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/Career-Profile-Forensic-Toxicologist.htm)

The ancient Greeks were the first to note the various signs and symptoms of poisons, and they were the first society known to uncover murders from poisoning due to this ability. Since that time, the field of [toxicology](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Glossary/g/Toxicology.htm) has developed and evolved significantly. Today, forensic toxicologists help investigators identify causes of death to include poisons, chemicals, and intoxicating substances. They assist in the prosecution of DUI and DWI arrests and can detect the presence of drugs or alcohol in a suspect or victim's blood stream. Aspiring toxicologists should have a firm grasp of chemistry, biology or preferably both, as well as knowledge of pharmacology.

[**9.  Forensic Accountant**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/Forensic-Accountant.htm)

Despite their notoriety and known ties to organized crime, some the United States' most famous gang leaders were ultimately brought to justice through finances and tax violations. The first forensic accountants were instrumental in successful prosecution of the likes of [Al Capone](http://crime.about.com/od/gangsters/ig/Mafia-Mug-Shots/capone_al_2.htm). Forensic accountants specialize in financial crimes and are trained to follow the money trail. As [white collar crimes](http://legalcareers.about.com/od/glossary/g/whitecollarcrim.htm) are on the rise, forensic accountants work to weed out fraud and help protect our bank accounts. [Forensic accountants](http://financecareers.about.com/od/publicaccountingfirms/a/Forensic-Accounting.htm) also assist courts in assessing awards and damages and identify and investigate financiers of terrorism. Forensic accountants can earn more than $100,000 per year, and should have at a minimum a bachelor's degree in finance or accounting.

[**10.  Forensic Anthropologist**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/Forensic-Anthropology.htm)

Grisly crimes and cold cases call for the expertise of someone who specializes in identifying human remains. By studying decomposed physical remains and skeletal systems, anthropologists can determine the age, sex and weight of a victim, as well as the types of injuries he or she received and the potential cause of death. Forensic anthropologists often work at colleges and universities and provide assistance to law enforcement entities on an as-needed, contractual basis. Forensic anthropologists generally hold a master's degree or doctorate in [physical anthropology](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Glossary/g/Physical-Anthropology.htm) and can expect to earn between $70,000 and $80,000 per year.

[**11.  Forensic Odontologist**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/a/Career-Profile-Forensic-Odontologist.htm)

There are times when DNA identification is impractical and [fingerprint analysis](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Forensic-Science-Careers/fl/Fingerprint-Analyst-Career-Profile.htm) is impossible. When particularly gruesome crimes occur or during mass casualty incidents, forensic odontologists use the unique dental features we all have to identify human remains. They can also analyze bite marks and compare them to samples in order to help identify victims and suspects, as well as help investigators determine whether injuries are defensive or offensive. Forensic odontologists have doctorates in dental surgery or dental medicine and usually practice general dentistry and perform forensics services in addition to their dental practice. Forensic odontologists can earn well over $100,000 per year.

[**12.  Forensic Psychologist**](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Career_Profiles/a/Forensic-Psycholgist.htm)

Forensic psychologists provide psychological services and analysis for nearly every facet of the criminal justice system. From [jury consulting](http://criminologycareers.about.com/od/Pyschology-Careers/a/Jury-Consultant.htm) to prison counseling, forensic psychologists perform important services to corrections, courts and law enforcement. They investigate allegations of child abuse, evaluate victims, witnesses and suspects for veracity and competency, and help judges determine whether a suspect is able to stand trial. Forensic psychologists also perform the important work of evaluating law enforcement candidates during the hiring process. On average, forensic psychologists earn about $57,000 per year, but salaries vary greatly depending on level of education, expertise and employer.

[**13.  Forensic Pathologist**](http://healthcareers.about.com/od/physiciancareers/p/How-To-Become-A-Pathologist.htm)

Forensic pathologists provide one of the most important components of any homicide investigation: the cause of death. Also known as medical examiners, forensic pathologists employ their medical training to identify which, if any, injuries were fatal. They can also help investigators learn the type of weapon used and an approximate time that the victim died. By determining cause of death, pathologists play a crucial role in learning whether or not a crime even occurred to begin with. Forensic pathologists are medical doctors and can earn more than $200,000 per year.

**Discover Careers in Forensic Science Questions**

1. What do forensic science technicians assist in?

2. Where do forensic science technicians conduct most of their work?

3. *Critical Thinking*: Why do you think the pay range for forensic science technicians is so large?

4. What can a bloodstain pattern analyst determine the examination of drips, spills, spatter, and stains?

5. *Critical Thinking*: What special skills might you need to be a good bloodstain pattern analyst?

6. What can forensic ballistic experts identify?

7. How much can a forensic firearms expert expect to earn?

8. Why is DNA analysis gaining more and more prominence in criminology?

9. *Critical Thinking*: Why would polygraphs have limited admissibility in courts?

10. What do polygraph examiners undergo?

11. Why do private contractors sometimes hire polygraph examiners?

12. What types of forgeries can forensic document examiners expose?

13. What type of crime do forensic document examiners frequently assist in?

14. What are forensic computer investigators trained to collect?

15. *Critical Thinking*: Why do you think demand for forensic computer investigators in increasing?

16. Who were the first to note the various signs and symptoms of poisons?

17. Aspiring toxicologists should have a firm grasp of what fields?

18. How were some the most famous gang leaders brought to justice?

19. What do forensic accountants assist courts in doing?

20. How much can a forensic account earn?

21. What can sometimes be determined from decomposed physical remains?

22. Where do forensic anthropologists typically work?

23. *Critical Thinking*: Why do you think forensic anthropologist usually work on a contractual basis?

24. When might a forensic odonatologist be needed in an investigation?

25. What type of education do you need to be a forensic odonatologist?

26. What are some the different things forensic psychologists do?

27. What valuable service do forensic psychologists perform for police department?

28. What important component do forensic pathologists provide?

29. What do forensic pathologists play a crucial role in?

30. *Critical Thinking*: Of the career you read about which one would you be most interested in? Explain why