

Fun Fingerprint Lessons

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Introduction: Actually "dusting" for fingerprints can be exciting and fun. This patented new magnetic applicator allows instant success with no prior training. Try one or all of these interesting exercises using the new "TEX" and magnetic powder.

Paper: Rub the back of your neck and forearms to collect natural oils onto your hands, then touch a piece of clean paper. Spread powder over the paper until a print is developed. The position of a print can increase the evidence value. There is a difference in the position of the prints when a person reads a note or when they write a note. (Thumb prints are rarely left on the back of a note by a person reading it, but are sometimes left by a person tearing the page from a notepad.) (Palm prints, and Fingerprints are frequently left on the front of the note by the author as they hold the paper while writing.) For added interest, saturate the paper with water and then allow to air dry before printing with magnetic powder. The water will not harm the prints.

Latex/Vinyl Gloves: Sometimes latent prints can be deposited by a person wearing gloves. As the body temperature warms the gloves, they become more flexible and form to the friction ridges. If oils are collected onto the outer surface of the latex gloves, it is possible for a latent print to be deposited onto any surface touched. After wearing a pair of latex/vinyl gloves for about fifteen minutes, rub the back of your neck and then touch a piece of glass or smooth ceramic tile. Dust the item for prints. Experiment with different brands of gloves. (This anomaly is especially perplexing to criminals at their trial...."How can those be my prints, I wore gloves.")

Shoe Prints: Many shoes with rubber soles leave behind an invisible shoeprint on smooth surfaces. Even leather soled shoes will have a rubber heel that will leave a print. The chemicals added to rubber to keep it soft and flexible, create a constant oily film on the surface of the rubber. These oils are deposited onto surfaces in much the same way a fingerprint is left. Step onto a smooth surface such as a magazine, or floor tile and then dust the areas for latent shoe prints. Unique cracks and marks in the sole are just as valuable as fingerprint evidence. Use a magnifying glass to compare the print with the shoe sole.

Human Skin: Living skin tissue is constantly being moisturized through natural secretions. If a person grabs another by the arm, you will probably not be successful developing prints, and will only see a smudge of fingerprint powder. But under some conditions a fingerprint may be developed. If; there is low humidity, the victim has dry skin, or the area of skin was previously covered by clothing, there is still a chance to develop prints. In these situations it is similar to developing prints on paper. The highest success rate comes from women and children with smooth, tight skin. Remove your socks and then place a print on the shin near the ankle. Try dusting this area for prints. (A small fan may be used to dry the skin prior to dusting for prints.)

Textured Items: Because of the flexibility of the skin, friction ridges sometimes penetrate into the valleys of a textured surface. This is especially true when a suspect holds a heavy object such as a brick, rock, or tree branch, because a tighter grip is required. Normal fingerprint powders will float across the peaks of the surface and will not develop the print in the lower valleys of a textured surface. Since magnetic powder is heavy, it settles into the lower valleys and develops the print. Experiment by dusting a variety of textured surfaces. Many new appliances have a print resistant surface made of fine texture. Ordinary fingerprint techniques will not develop prints.

Arson prints: Sometimes an arsonist will burn items to cover up a crime. Since they know they will torch the crime scene, they are not concerned about leaving their prints. Some prints are still found after the Fire Department extinguishes the fire. For instance, if a person empties the paper contents of a glove compartment of a car as they are looking for valuables, they may drop the paper in a pile on the floor of the vehicle. These items will burn only one layer at a time because the bottom items have limited access to oxygen. Touch several pieces of paper, and then place them flat on the ground. Try to light them on fire with a cigarette lighter. (Do not attempt this indoors or in a windy area.) You will notice they will burn one layer at a time. Extinguish with a glass of water. Sift through the ashes and gently separate the wet paper. Lay them on a textured surface to dry. They can then be dusted with magnetic powder to develop the prints.

If the person uses a can of accelerant such as charcoal lighter and then tosses the can into the car to burn, the prints will actually etch into the metal, and be protected with a layer of soot. Try touching an empty soda can, and then burning it in a fire. Ignite a piece of wadded up masking tape for maximum soot. Hold the can in the fire and smoke with a pair of needle nose pliers. Remove the can after it turns black, and allow it to air dry. After it has cooled, rinse under a light stream of water from a faucet. Do not rub. The prints will appear like magic. They can be photographed or lifted with tape. Fingerprint powder is not necessary.