Case Study: Overlooked Details, the i-dot

By August Meyer, QDE

When simulating the signature of another person the primary focus tends to be based on one simple premise; the simulation must *look* like the genuine signature. Document examiners typically refer to this as the 'pictorial appearance' of a signature. If a signature does not look like an authentic signature, the average layperson will likely become suspicious of the signature and reject it.

The effort involved to simulate another person's signature requires attention to detail regarding obvious features such as size, shape, and slant. Examiners will look at these aspects of the handwriting, but these features do not rank very high when identifying an author. The fundamental aspects of writing or signatures are weighted more heavily. The line quality, pressure patterns, method of construction for letters and connections, become more significant to handwriting identification for essentially two reasons; they are often overlooked and are more difficult to simulate.

Additionally, there are other inconspicuous aspects of handwriting that a potential forger may overlook. The following case illustrated this principle and provided additional evidence for forming the basis of my opinion. While there were many discrepancies between the questioned and known signatures, in this article the focus will be on one of them for its instructive value; the i-dot.

Dots in general provide good identification value due to being overlooked by potential forgers. Dots are also highly variable and individual to their respective writers. Especially in signatures the i-dot may be written quickly with little conscious effort. Despite the name 'i-dot,' it often has more versions than it is given credit. It may be just a dot, or it may be a short line, dash, swoosh, circle, heart, star, x, any of a dozen other variations, or omitted entirely. Figure 1 shows different variations on i-dots.

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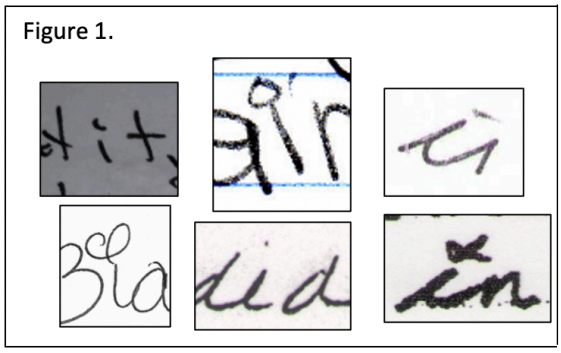
In addition to the dot style, dot *placement* is also important. Is the dot

Figure 1.



placed on the stem? Above the stem? Left of the stem? Nowhere near the stem? The possibilities are endless when it comes to where a writer chooses to place the i-dot. Other factors, such as writing speed or unusual writing positions or angles can also affect the dot placement. Some writers have so much variability that it is impossible to predict where the dot will be placed. In these cases, inconsistency is also a form of consistency. The writer may be consistently inconsistent when it comes to dot placement and form. Thus, a questioned signature with the dot located predictably may indicate an intentionally placed i-dot.

In this case, two questioned signatures were provided to me. The representative for the attorney believed the signatures to be authentic since they matched the pictorial appearance of known signatures. While the signatures did indeed look correct at first glance, further examination showed many differences from the known signatures. Among the discrepancies were the i-dots.

Figure 2.

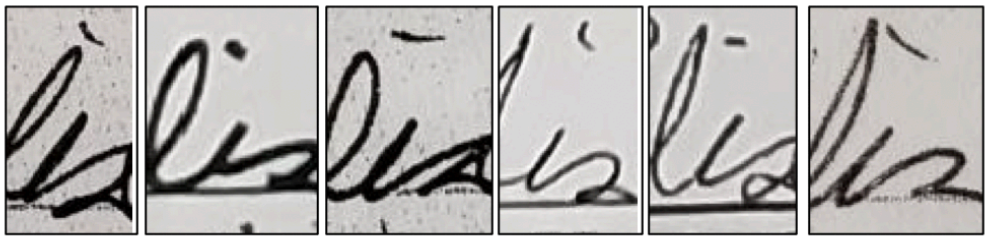


Figure 2 shows a sampling of the i-dots from known signatures. Demonstrated is the variation in the size, direction, length, and to an extent, placement, of the dot. For the most part

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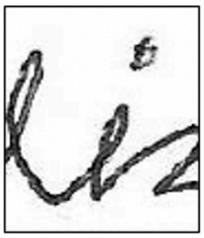
this writer has very quickly written dots that become dashes or swooshes as the pen moves to make the next letter. The dots are generally high above the stem with a tendency to be placed to the left and occasionally over the previous letter. In all dots, there is an indication of

Figure 3. Q1 and Q2



movement from left to right.

Now we turn to the questioned signatures. Figure 3 shows the i-dots from Q1 and Q2. The differences between the questioned and known become obvious. The i-dots are placed precisely above the stem in both signatures, there is no tendency to become a dash and no rightward movement apparent. Q1 also appears to be a scribble dot. These features indicate that the dots were *placed* instead of *written* as in the known signatures. The person attempting to simulate the known signatures was too careful when placing the i-dots which is inconsistent with the known signatures.

While this singular feature is not enough to come to an opinion regarding authorship, it is one of the many aspects of handwriting that may provide valuable clues. In this instance this trait was a powerfully demonstrative feature which was easy to articulate and understand. This along with many other features provided a strong basis for my opinion that the questioned signatures were not genuine.

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