



## FACES INTERVIEWING TIPS

### #1 Benefits of Computerized Composites

**Computer composites have some key advantages over traditional sketch artists. These are some of the benefits:**

- Most police departments don't have the resources to maintain a staff composite artist, and the cost of bringing in a professional artist is usually prohibitive. As a result, composite sketches are often reserved for few high profile cases.
- All serious offences deserve rigorous and effective investigation. Investigations can significantly benefit from composite evidence when no other evidence (such as fingerprints) are available to identify the suspect. Computerized composite technology allows any investigator to produce composites quickly and effectively – and use in a wider range of cases.
- The quality and style of professional sketches can vary widely. Using a computer composite system establishes a common standard across jurisdictions, making it easier for police agencies to collaborate on cases.
- Traditional sketches are difficult to transmit to other police agencies. Detail is lost when faxing the image: scanning and sending a traditional composite electronically can also result in loss of detail, as well as overloading telecommunications networks because image files are very large.
- The FACES composite system automatically generates a 56-digit alphanumeric code for each composite. Each code is unique and provides a “fingerprint” of the composite. The codes are small – less than 1KB in size – and so can be transmitted easily by email or even by phone or radio. When received, the code is entered into the receiver's FACES system and the composite recreated in exact detail.
- FACES composites are be easily exported as JPEG files to add to police bulletins and websites. Also, they can be archived and managed in standard mugshot database systems, and used with facial recognition technology to search and find potential matches to develop a “virtual lineup” for witnesses.

### #2 Setting Up a Composite Interview

**The interview environment will have a real impact on the success of your composite. Here are some basic points on setting up a composite interview:**

- Composite interviews should be done after the initial detective's interview and report.
- Unless the circumstances absolutely require it, don't attempt a composite interview with a traumatized victim or witness immediately after the event. You'll get better information the next day, when the V/W is calm and able to focus.
- Allow two hours for the composite interview so the V/W doesn't feel rushed or pressured. But in most cases, any longer than that can be counter productive. If a composite interview isn't successful in two hours, it's unlikely to be successful at all.
- Minimize any distractions during the interview that can interfere with the V/W's concentration. Only the FACES operator and the V/W should be in the room: anyone else can observe through a one-way mirror or video monitor.
- If the V/W is a child and needs a parent to attend, or a traumatized V/W wants a friend for support, make it clear to them that they should NOT interrupt the composite process.

- Set up the interview room so that the V/W sits beside you and see the FACES screen as the composite is being developed.

### **#3 Building Rapport with Composite Witnesses**

**Establishing good communications with the victim/witness is essential to encouraging memory recall and getting the information you need to build the composite. Although it's important to develop your own interview style, here are some basic techniques:**

- First impressions are lasting so try to establish rapport early, from your first meeting with the V/W.
- Be on time and be prepared for the interview and arrange the interview to promote the best possible environment for communication (see Tip #1 – Setting Up a Composite Interview).
- The V/W will expect you to take charge of the interview, but do so in a positive, non-aggressive way that emphasizes your patience and commitment to support them in the composite process.
- Keep in mind that the V/W may need some reassurance. It can be as simple as asking “How are you doing?” at the start of the interview, checking whether they want something to drink, assuring them that they can take a break at any time.
- Be an “active” listener. Respond to what the V/W is saying by nodding your head, adding a word or two. Try to speak less, and listen more, and never interrupt.
- Every V/W will be anxious and worried that they won't do a good job. Give them encouragement at every step of the composite process. Tell them they're doing a great job.
- There may be long pauses while the V/W considers different features. Try to use phrases such as “It's okay, take your time,” or “We'll work on this together to get this right.” Never show frustration or impatience – it will make the work slower.

### **#4 Improving Recall During a Composite Interview**

**Investigators use a number of techniques to improve victim/witness recall in a composite interview. Try them and see which ones work for you:**

- Ask some general questions about the suspect at the start, to help both you and the V/W start to get a mental picture of appearance. What was the suspect's race? Was he heavy or thin? What was his approximate age? Did he have a full or narrow face? Did he have any peculiar or distinguishing facial features?
- When you start to focus on the facial features, ask the V/W to close their eyes, bring the suspect's face to mind, and then, when they're ready, describe it to you. It's important not to interrupt while they're bringing up this mental picture.
- If the V/W discusses details of the incident it may upset them and interfere with recall. A good idea is to suggest to the V/W that what you both need to focus on during this session is what the suspect looked like, and not what he did.
- Here are five simple phrases you can use in composite interviews to relax and encourage the victim/witness and improve the composite process.
  - 1) I want you to relax and take your time.

- 2) We're going to build this face together
- 3) Solving this case doesn't depend solely on how well you do with this composite.
- 4) I want you to be patient and do the best you can. We'll only get a good composite by trying a lot of different combinations.
- 5) If you're tired we can take a break.

## **#5 Building the Suspect Composite**

**Every composite artist has their own sequence for developing a facial image. Here is a standard approach:**

- In building a composite, start with the general shape of the face (thin, round, pointed, square), and then the basic features (eyes, nose and mouth).
- Demonstrate some of the features of the software at the start of the interview – that you can make features bigger or smaller, or move it up or down etc – so the V/W understands how you can fine tune them.
- At every step of the process, encourage the V/W, telling them they're doing a good job. As the composite is developed, the V/W will naturally gain confidence and a sense of accomplishment, and be able to offer further information and details.
- Be careful not to inadvertently lead the V/W by suggesting modifications. When you add a feature you can just say "How does that look? I can make it bigger or smaller."
- Some interviewers find it useful to let the V/W look through the FACES Q-cards of thumbnail facial features during the composite process. Other V/Ws will prefer to look at the screen.
- Some V/W will want to use FACES themselves to scroll through and select features. This can be very effective, as long as you make note of any features that the V/W select themselves.
- If you're asked by the V/W to make the composite darker, explain that a copy machine can be used later to darken the skin tone. (FACES uses a neutral, universal skin tone because it's more effective to focus on facial features when both describing, and identifying, a suspect.)

## **#6 Composite Interviews with Multiple and Child Witnesses**

**A criminal incident may involve multiple victim/witnesses or child witnesses. Here are some basic guidelines:**

- Witnesses should be interviewed individually. It's strongly recommended that you develop a single composite, with notes on which witness provided which facial detail. Releasing multiple composites confuses the identification process.
- With multiple V/W, you might interview women first. Many investigators find that female V/Ws have better recall for details on facial features.
- Children are also extremely good at recalling details, and may be a good first interview. But as investigators know, child interviews have special challenges – most importantly, they can be easily influenced by your behavior in the interview.
- Simplify the language you use with children, and be particularly careful not to inadvertently encourage them to fabricate information in an effort to please you.

- For example, asking a question a second time may be a cue for a child that the interviewer was unhappy with his or her first response. Asking “Is that all you can remember?” may suggest to a child that they need to add more detail.

## #7 Legal Issues Regarding Composite Evidence

The following is some general advice to anticipate and avoid legal issues relating to your composite:

- The first composite out of the printer is evidence (original) and should be added to the case file.
- The officer who created the composite should sign the front of the original copy/ The back of the composite should have the time, date, case number and V/W signature.
- A Computer Image Report should be attached to the composite. FACES software includes a template report that you can use. Its key elements are:
  - Name of the Forensic Artist/Investigator
  - Location of the Interview
  - Brand of computer and monitor
  - Date of interview
  - Interview start and finish time
  - Basic suspect description
  - Case number
  - Crime classification
  - Name of Witness/Victim
  - Remarks (brief)
- If a photo line-up or live line-up is planned, it’s usually better to do the composite first to avoid potential legal challenges.
- At the end of the composite process, ask the V/W how confident they are that the image is a correct likeness of the suspect. If they express doubt, you may want to recommend against publicizing the image. A weak composite can result in wasted effort with law enforcement looking for the wrong person.

## #8 Improving your Composite Skills

Here are a few ways you can practice and improve your composite skills:

- FACES 4.0 has an observation game. A composite image generated by FACES is displayed for a few minutes. Then it disappears and you try to reproduce it as accurately as possible. It’s an excellent way to improve skill and become more familiar with the FACES database of features.
- Developing FACES composites from arrest photos is also good practice. When you’re doing your first ones, try laying a ruler on the photo to see how features line up with each other, and basic face proportions.
- The ruler exercise (above) will help you to avoid two of the most common composite errors:
  - The neck is too thin for the head. This either makes the composite look too juvenile or, in the extreme, gives the composite a cartoon-like appearance and affects its credibility. Of course, if you are working on a composite of an adolescent or female suspect, a thin neck may be appropriate.
  - The face shape is incorrect. Many investigators start their composites with general shape of head (round, thin, pointed, square) because this is important information about appearance. A thin face will suggest the suspect has a slight overall build, when the opposite could be true.