

**'Fundamentals of Forensic Science'**, Houck MM and Siegel JA, 2006  
ISBN 0-12-356762-9 £50 Academic Press/ Elsevier (view the [contents](#)  
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Forensic science is such an 'all-encompassing' subject, embracing aspects of a wide-variety of disparate disciplines that it is difficult to pitch the level of detail required by 'forensic science' students at the required level.

The authors of this single volume text recognise this difficulty, and aim to cover the concepts underpinning the *forensic* part of the subject, in order to 'foster critical thinking' about the evidential issues presented by 'real life' casework.

As with most similar undergraduate texts, there are end-of-chapter 'self-test' questions, and the authors have attempted to illustrate their content with examples of the application of scientific principles to forensic work.

They have also attempted to 'go beyond core' knowledge, by incorporating chapters on the 'medical' specialties (forensic pathology and odontology), and the allied biological sciences (anthropology and entomology). As an basic introduction to these topics, this book is fantastic - the level of detail in the anthropology chapter, for example, is just about right.

The chapter on forensic pathology, however, is not completely accurate, and this detracts from the high quality resources presented elsewhere in the book.

For example, with regard to the role of the pathologist in the examination of microscopic slides prepared from tissues retained following a postmortem examination, the authors state that the *'medical technologist or histologist will [then] examine the [microscopic] sections, write a report and pass it along to the pathologist'*, which is certainly not the case!

Minor criticisms relate to the inconsistent use of units - in some places metric, whilst in others Imperial - and occasional ambiguous sentences. For example, when describing a 'contusion', the authors state that *'the blood pressures the tissues enough to break small blood vessels in the tissues'* that could have benefited from tighter editing.

The layout is excellent, and the standard of illustrations outstanding.

For an overview of forensic science, one could certainly gain a great deal from reading this book, and the regular re-iteration of the evidential value of each 'sub-specialty' is a welcome approach, placing the subject matter in its rightful context.

I enjoyed reading most of this book, and found plenty of useful references to additional resources, both in print and on the internet.

The authors have produced a quality text, which will certainly benefit students of forensic science enormously. For those of us within the *medical forensic specialties*, this book provides an excellent general forensic science resource, but more detailed sub-specialty information will need to be gleaned from additional sources.