

Frequently Asked Questions from LASD detectives

The Basics

How long does a drawing take?

Approximately, two hours. If a translator is involved, it will take longer. If there is a second witness for the same case & suspect, they are interviewed separately. If they describe a similar suspect, we show them the drawing and see if they can improve anything. There is only one drawing per suspect.

What will I be getting from the Artist?

First, you will get a scan of the drawing (jpeg). The jpeg is used in wanted bulletins, sent to the media or passed out to patrol. The actual drawing and copy of notes are sent later, they're discoverable.

Will you testify on the work you created?

Yes! A professional forensic artist's training and responsibilities include this.

Can I sit in on the drawing? What about others?

Yes, the detective is encouraged to sit in, quietly, on the interview. The forensic artist is conducting the interview, if you have any questions, they should wait until a break.

As few people as possible is best for the witness or victim. People who have come as support, generally will wait outside.

Does it really matter who does the drawing for my case?

It does matter. LASD has invested time and training to have forensic professionals who work within the agency protocols and be there to testify and support your case.

"Is That a Problem...?"

... if I've already shown my victim gang photos?

It is best to get the drawing done first then show photos. Showing your victim photos ahead of time can be problematic. We can still do the drawing but it is not ideal. Defense, down the road, will try and have a field day.

... my case is an older case (victim's disclosure was late)?

Though time has passed, people remember. Getting a drawing may assist, even at this late date.

... I have witnesses who have agreed to cooperate years after this homicide occurred – is it too late to do a drawing?

As long as the witness is forthcoming, we can try. If they are willing, so are we.

... my witness saw a profile only? *Profiles, or three quarter views are fine and we will draw them.*

... My suspect wore a hoodie, sunglasses **and** a bandana.

*Yes, that combination IS a problem – they are too covered up. But if it is just a hoodie **OR** just sunglasses, then there is enough to still draw a representation.*

... My witness is in jail (or juvenile hall, state prison, etc...) will you go there?

Yes, we go to jails, schools, prisons and hospitals if the witness is there.

... The drawing doesn't look like exactly like the suspect's photo.

Composites are not meant to be portraits. However, if there is little or no similarity there may be very good reasons. Was the witness sincere? Is this a good photo of the suspect? Do you have another photo (DMV or booking) to compare to? Call us about it.

Multiple Suspects/ Witnesses/ Cases

I have multiple suspects and witnesses (on one case) – how does this get handled?
Will I get a separate drawing from each witness for each suspect?

It is important to draw one composite per suspect. We depend on the detective to work out "Who Saw Who." We will also help you work that out when we get there. We also do not group witnesses. "Group composites" are not advisable.

There is a cluster of different cases in my region with a similar M.O. in each one. How is that handled when getting a drawing done?

If you suspect that these cases may be related, determine who got the best look out of all the cases. That victim should establish a drawing and from there detectives can see if their victims agree with it. Sometimes using the most current victim will be able to show "what they look like right now."

Age Progressions

I have an old case, where the suspect is still outstanding. What's needed for an age progression of what the suspect may currently look like?

A good photo, clean and clear is extremely helpful, along with photos of his parents or better yet his siblings at the target age he would be today. DMV photos are helpful. Any information on his living habits (he smokes, likes to live on the streets or has alcohol and drug issues) can have an effect on his looks and be considered for the drawing.

Can you age progress to an adult image from a newborn infant photo?

No, not from a small newborn infant's photo, they are too young and have not developed enough in age. Working with a photo of a younger child, referencing their parents/sibling's photos if possible, is the accepted and professional approach.

Can you create from an infant's photo what the parental images might look like?

No. There is no information for this what so ever.

Post Mortem Drawings

What is required for getting a post mortem drawing of a victim done?

Call us before the post not after. Getting a chance to view the victim before the autopsy, take measurements and notes is important to getting a detailed image created. We refer to photographs that the coroner has taken as we develop the drawing. The frontal and lateral are views are crucial and ideally the jaw to be closed and the head tilted forward so there is no facial distortion.

Digital Imaging

I'm having a hard time finding similar photos to put together a six pack for a witness. My suspect has a unique hairstyle and tattoos on his face. Can you help?

Yes. Find five somewhat similar faces and we will give them approximate hair & tats to "level the playing field" and even out the comparison. Everyone is brought to the level of the suspect – we do not change the suspect's face.

I have very poor image video of a suspect. Can you work from that?

Yes, we can try to approximate what they may look like. Getting stills as well as video is ideal.

For Outside Agencies

Do you work for other agencies and is there a cost for this service?

Our workload at LASD is our first priority. For composite drawings, we do extend professional courtesy to outside agencies within the county and surrounding counties. Be prepared to bring your witness to us, if our workload is impacted and we are not able to travel.

What are the qualifications for a professional forensic artist?

Ideally, they are connected to a law enforcement agency either full or part time, as a contractor or as a volunteer. They must have forensic art training, an art degree is not enough. There is more to this forensic discipline than just drawing. Understanding the witness interview process, the dynamics of lying and the legal ramifications of what the artist does and how it can affect a case all are part of this training.

Where can I find a professional forensic artist in my jurisdiction?

Contact us and we can refer you to a practicing professional in your area.