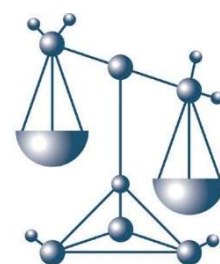




MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY

A document for emerging laboratories

International Forensic Strategic Alliance
Version 1



IFSA

International Forensic Strategic Alliance

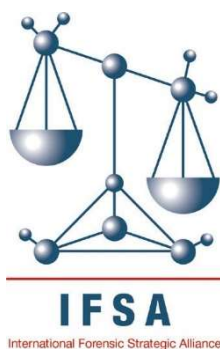


INTERNATIONAL FORENSIC STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY

A document for emerging laboratories

IFSA MRD 11



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INTRODUCTION

The International Forensic Strategic Alliance (IFSA) has developed this document to provide minimum requirements that will enable emerging forensic providers in developing countries to produce scientific services for the Criminal Justice System.

The purpose of this document is to establish a baseline or starting point that must be followed in order to achieve reliable results. Forensic providers should build on this foundation and strive to continually improve the quality of services provided.

This document describes the minimum requirements for forensic anthropology practice. It addresses the following framework:

1. Competence of Personnel.
2. Equipment and Consumables.
3. Collection, Analysis, Interpretation, Reporting.
4. Procedures, Protocols, Validation.
5. Quality Management.





FOREWORD

The International Forensic Strategic Alliance (IFSA) is a multilateral partnership between the six regional networks of operational forensic laboratories:

- the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD)
- the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes (ENFSI)
- the National Institute of Forensic Science Australia New Zealand (NIFS ANZ)
- la Academia Iberoamericana de Criminalística y Estudios Forenses (AICEF)
- the Asian Forensic Sciences Network (AFSN)
- the Southern Africa Regional Forensic Science Network (SARFS).

The IFSA works closely with its three strategic partners, Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and INTERPOL.

The IFSA recognises the importance of a quality management framework in forensic laboratories to provide quality and standardised results, be it procedures undertaken in the field or in the laboratory.

In February 2012, at the special IFSA meeting hosted by UNODC and convened in Vienna to discuss the needs of the emerging forensic laboratories in developing countries, a decision was taken to create a set of minimum requirement documents (MRD) filling the gap in recommendations available for the current management of these laboratories.

In October 2014, the first series of three MRD documents were created. These documents have focused on the critical quality areas, using simple terms and illustrations. They were followed by other documents covering different forensic science areas. Further MRDs are still being written and the possibility for new MRDs are constantly considered and evaluated. Documents are being translated to other languages by IFSA membership as well. A glossary to explain common terms used in the document has also been included when appropriate.

These MRDs are meant to act as a start-up guide for emerging forensic laboratories to quickly establish their quality management system and scientific/technical capabilities. Once achieved, the laboratories should continue to build on this foundation and strive to continually improve the quality of services through undergoing accreditations to established standards.

In the drafting of these documents, scientific working groups and experts from the six regional forensic science networks, as well as IFSA strategic partners, made valuable contributions during the various rounds of consultation. The final MRDs presented in this series would not be possible without the involvement of all.

The IFSA hopes that these documents will play an important role for emerging forensic laboratories in their journey towards building quality forensic services.

IFSA Board

September 2025

1. OVERVIEW OF FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Forensic anthropology refers to the application of principles of physical or biological anthropology (the study of human physical variation) to forensic and/or medico-legal matters. Forensic anthropology also draws on aspects of forensic archaeology and forensic taphonomy to interpret human skeletal remains. Most forensic anthropologists will focus on the skeletal remains of deceased people, however forensic anthropologists may also have expertise in interpreting human anatomical variation and individual physical features in living persons, for example, identification of an individual from photographs or other media, or forensic age estimation.

Forensic anthropology practitioners can provide services in a range of different contexts. These include routine jurisdictional casework, long-term missing person cases, disaster victim identification, and/or the investigation of cases of political, ethnic, or religious violence. Forensic anthropology practitioners should have a clear understanding of their duties and responsibilities and should fulfill these according to discipline-specific codes of practice and ethics [1] [2] [3] [4]. Many jurisdictions have developed such frameworks for practitioners, professional bodies and the legal community. These frameworks, while specific for anthropology, share fundamental concepts with most forensic sciences in terms of handling of evidence, application of scientific methods, and professional conduct. In the absence of professional bodies or other formal registration, developing countries and aspiring practitioners should consider implementing these concepts to demonstrate professional rigour and pave the way for future recognition.



2. COMPETENCE OF PERSONNEL

This section recommends minimum education and training required for forensic anthropologists to examine, analyse, interpret, and record human anatomy, anatomical variation and human skeletal remains. It is acknowledged that some jurisdictions may recognise experience in lieu of formal qualifications or may initially have limited qualified personnel to engage in forensic anthropology work. Some jurisdictions seeking to develop a forensic anthropology service may not initially meet standards of formal practitioner registration and/or practitioners meeting the minimal educational requirements for forensic anthropology outlined below, however the aim is that these are addressed as the service matures.

2.1 EDUCATION

Personnel involved with the recovery and analysis of human skeletal remains should have a relevant undergraduate university degree qualification (e.g., a science degree majoring in Human Anatomy, or an arts degree majoring in Anthropology or Bioarchaeology).

While a higher degree relevant to the field (e.g., masters or doctorate in forensic anthropology, human osteology, physical/biological anthropology, or human anatomy) from is preferred, this requirement will depend on the jurisdiction in which the practitioner is employed.

2.2 TRAINING

A forensic anthropologist should be trained in:

- recording, interpreting, and undertaking / aiding the recovery of human remains at a scene;
- assessing whether material is osseous (i.e., bone) or non-osseous;
- assessing whether material is of human or non-human origin;
- assessing the preservation (completeness, and condition) of the human remains (i.e., taphonomic changes);
- assessing whether human remains are of medico-legal significance (noting that the definition of medico-legal significance will be specific to the practitioner's jurisdiction);
- establishing the minimum number of individuals present;
- developing or reconstructing a biological profile (estimation of age-at-death or biological age; biological sex; population affinity (or ancestry); and stature);
- assessing the presence of individualising skeletal traits, including evidence of ante-mortem medical conditions or devices;
- assessing and recording traumatic injuries and providing an opinion about the timing of those injuries (i.e., ante-mortem or peri-mortem);
- assessing and providing an opinion as to the mechanism causing the defect present in a traumatic injury (i.e., blunt force, sharp force, or projectile trauma)
- commenting on the post-mortem interval (i.e., time since death) where possible and appropriate;
- reconstructing fragmented bones;
- providing advice to investigators on the most appropriate methods of identification, and
- providing expert evidence in court.

In addition, some forensic anthropologists may have training in more specialised areas such as facial reconstruction/facial approximation, histopathology, or DNA sampling.



3. EQUIPMENT AND CONSUMABLES

3.1 FACILITIES

Working space: The laboratory space should be in a secure building/room with good lighting (ideally hospital grade). The laboratory space may be located within a working mortuary, forensic science facility, university or elsewhere. The size of the room should reflect:

- the number of cases the laboratory expects to manage per year;
- the space required for ongoing storage /curation of cases, and
- the equipment required for examinations.

Access points: There should be minimal access points to maintain good security (e.g., only one entrance), but sufficient access points to allow movement of cases in and out with ease. For those laboratories that are linked with a mortuary, consideration should be given to the width of doorways, rooms, and corridors if mortuary trolleys need to be wheeled in and out.

Power: This is necessary for equipment, such as lighting, microscopes, cameras, and computers. Consider the location of power points in relation to workspaces and equipment.

Storage: Case evidence should be securely stored in appropriate packaging, which may vary in size depending on the preservation of the skeletal material. Ideally, skeletonised remains should be stored in paper/cardboard packaging where possible to prevent condensation and/or formation of mould. Wet bone with tissue present should be stored in impervious packaging and refrigerated. If possible, the storage area for dry bones should be temperature and humidity controlled to curation standards for skeletal material. Cupboards and/or racking may be used to store human remains. Storage areas should be designed to prevent infestation by insects or vermin.

3.2 EQUIPMENT

3.2.1. Scene assessment and recovery equipment

In addition to standard scene equipment provided by crime scene examiners, such as GPS/photographic/mapping tools; general anthropology equipment that may be useful if required to attend a scene is listed below.

Practitioners may develop their own equipment list based on their personal preferences and role at the scene.

This items in this list are in no particular order and not exhaustive or mandatory.

- Camera and photographic scales
- Clipboard
- Recording forms and drawing kit
- Marker pens
- Compass, north arrow, pointers and scales
- Gloves and other personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Probes
- Brushes, trowels and other digging implements
- Buckets and wheelbarrows
- Tarpaulins
- Sieves of various mesh sizes (plastic preferred to minimise damage)
- At least two tape measures (e.g., 10 m, 30 m)

- String (different colours) and pegs (large nails)
- Chain of custody forms
- Body bags, paper bags and plastic bags of various sizes
- Tags/labels for bags (human remains and evidence)
- Bubble wrap
- Tape/evidence seals
- Boxes (for transferring remains)

3.2.2 Standard laboratory equipment

In addition to standard laboratory/mortuary equipment such as trolleys/tables and benches, general anthropology equipment that may be useful for skeletal remains examination is listed below. Practitioners may develop their own equipment list based on their personal preferences. This items in this list are in no particular order and not exhaustive or mandatory.

- At least one (but ideally multiple) table/s large enough to lay out an entire adult skeleton in anatomical position. Consider having a neutral-coloured table (e.g., matte grey/black/blue) to provide an appropriate background for photo documentation (note that tables can also be covered with cloth sheets, paper or plastic to protect the remains and/or examination surface).
- Ladder and/or step stool for overhead photography
- Sink and a good water source.
- Processing area for maceration. (Note: As there are varying methods for maceration, different equipment and chemicals will be required depending on the method utilised [5])
- Clean bench top with computer.
- Laboratory appropriate stools/chairs for seating (any upholstery should be easily cleanable)

3.2.3 Examination equipment

- An optical microscope that is either portable (e.g., magnifying glass (eye loupe) or a Dino-Lite) or permanent (e.g., stereomicroscope). Different types of microscopes may be needed depending on the magnification required. For example, a stereomicroscope has a relatively low optical resolution power with magnification ranging from 6x to 50x, whilst a compound microscope has higher optical resolution with magnification ranging from 40x to 1000x.
- Handheld light or surgical lighting that can be utilised as needed in addition to standard overhead lighting
- High-quality digital SLR camera and scales
- Tweezers, scalpels, forceps, scissors
- Recording forms
- Labels (white print on black background is recommended to reduce glare)
- Sieves of various mesh sizes
- Measuring tools that include digital and spreading callipers, a flexible tape measure, and an osteometric board
- A sand tray to hold fragments when undertaking reconstruction of fragmented skeletal elements
- Sand, paper or other packaging material (useful for helping articulate fragments, vertebra, etc.)(note, avoid foam padding or bubble wrap as they can obscure bony features and make photography difficult)
- Glues/adhesives for reconstruction

- Bean bags/donut rings for supporting/positioning remains for examination and photography
- Material for neutral photographic background (such as black or dark coloured cloth measuring approximately 1 m²)
- DNA sampling equipment (if required and if personnel are trained in minimising contamination)

3.2.4 Reference material

- Human and non-human skeletal and cast remains for reference
- Textbooks
- Databases and software (see xxx below)

3.3 CONSUMABLES

In addition to standard laboratory/mortuary consumables such as pens, markers and specimen collection equipment and containers, general anthropology equipment that may be useful for skeletal remains examination is listed below. Practitioners may develop their own equipment list based on their personal preferences. This items in this list are in no particular order and not exhaustive or mandatory.

- Scales of varying lengths and pointers (consider whether scales will be disposable or reusable), and if reusable, able to be carefully cleaned between cases.
- Case labels
- Cleaning supplies (commonly used agents are bleach, alcohol, water, detergent)
- DNA sampling equipment

3.4 PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that may be useful for skeletal remains examination is listed below. Scene PPE may be different to laboratory PPE. Practitioners may develop their own PPE list based on their personal preferences and scene hazards. This items in this list are in no particular order and not exhaustive or mandatory.

- Surgical scrubs, surgical gown or laboratory coat
- Latex or nitrile gloves (or similar impervious gloves)
- Heavy duty gloves (to prevent cuts from sharp instruments, broken bone margins or sharp hazards)
- plastic or water-repellent gown
- boots or shoe covers
- eye protection
- hair protection

Note: additional PPE to prevent sample contamination should be worn (and changed regularly) when DNA sampling is being undertaken.

4. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION & REPORTING

COLLECTION

In some medico-legal cases the forensic anthropologist (if suitably trained) will be required to recover the remains, that is, attend the scene and assist with the recovery of the remains, whilst in other cases scene attendance is not required as the remains will be admitted to the mortuary before a forensic anthropology examination is requested.

4.1 SCENE ATTENDANCE

A forensic anthropologist may be requested to attend a scene to assist with searching, locating and/or recovering remains and associated evidence [6]. The key role of the forensic anthropologist in scene searching is to assist with the identification of osseous material as human or non-human remains. All stages of the collection process will typically be done in collaboration with crime scene examiners and may also involve other specialists (e.g., archaeologists, entomologists, etc.).

The forensic anthropologist will usually work with police in developing a search strategy and provide ongoing advice and assistance during the search (this can also be achieved remotely). The search strategy will be developed using available information from police including the presumed circumstances and identity of the missing person. The time since the event occurred is important information as it allows the anthropologist to determine the likely condition of remains and advise accordingly.

Once the probable or actual location of human remains has been established, the forensic anthropologist will usually advise on recording and recovery techniques suitable for the context of the investigation. Such techniques may include, but are not limited to:

- Scene recording and gridding
- Temperature at scene (for computing PMI if needed, if no forensic entomologist is present)
- Excavation employing archaeological techniques (if no forensic archaeologist present)
- Collection of samples (e.g., insects, vegetation, soil) (if no relevant experts are present)
- Recovery and packaging of remains for transfer from the scene
- Taphonomic assessment
- Assessment of skeletal completeness and preliminary assessment of minimum number of individuals (in order to advise search teams/SIO of missing elements, etc.)

4.2 ANALYSIS

An analysis of human remains may include all, or some, of the following stages.

4.2.1 Assessment of Completeness and Condition (Preservation)

Providing a description of the preservation of the remains is essential. This includes describing the completeness (e.g., complete skeleton, multiple bones, single bone, multiple bone fragments, single bone fragment) and the condition, burnt or unburnt, colour, surface texture, surface changes, shape changes, and odour of the remains. This description should initially be undertaken prior to processing (i.e., removing any extraneous material or tissue remnants and cleaning the bones). This would usually include photographing and describing the bones as they were first received and/or observed. Searching for and collecting other evidence (e.g., trace evidence; insects for entomological analysis to potentially provide a post-mortem interval estimate) should also be considered and discussed with investigators/other practitioners. Once recording and collection has been completed, the remains

can be processed (if deemed appropriate), followed by further examination and detailed analysis. Assessment of alterations to bones (i.e., scavenging as opposed to dismemberment, etc.) should be commented on and addressed further in trauma assessment (see below) if appropriate.

4.2.2 Distinguishing Osseous/Dental remains from Non-Osseous Materials

Assessment of size, morphology, texture, and pertinent anatomical landmarks is undertaken to differentiate bones and/or dentition from extraneous materials (e.g., rock, wood, shell, or some manufactured materials). The selection of techniques and type of analysis required for this assessment may vary depending on the condition, and size of the specimen/s and the available resources. Some techniques that may assist include histology, scanning electron microscopy, XRD, and genetic testing.

4.2.3 Distinguishing Human from Non-human Remains

Assessment of morphology (overall size and shape) and pertinent anatomical landmarks is undertaken to differentiate between human and non-human bones. The selection of techniques or the type of analysis required for this assessment may vary depending on the completeness of the elements to be examined.

4.2.4 Determining the Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) Present

In cases where the remains are commingled and/or fragmentary, it may be necessary to determine how many individuals are present. Assessment of the number of individuals present or the minimum number of individuals (MNI) is ascertained by:

- Anatomical association (for example, position of skeletal elements *in situ* and/or residual soft tissue articulation)
- Duplication of skeletal elements, which will be apparent when laying out the remains and recording the skeletal inventory, and /or
- Inconsistencies in bone size, color, age, sex, or even population affinity indicators.

Contextual information from the scene (if available) may be of value when undertaking these determinations on fragmentary or incomplete remains.

4.2.5 Determining whether the Human Remains are of Medico-Legal Significance

The determination of medico-legal (i.e., forensic) significance is used to differentiate remains of historical or archaeological context from those requiring coronial or criminal investigation. Human remains that may be recent but have no forensic-medical interest include: trophy skulls; teaching/reference specimens; cadaver specimens; religious or ceremonial material, or inadvertently disturbed cemetery remains.

Legislation that defines a time period for when remains are of medico-legal significance varies depending on the jurisdiction in which the examination is being undertaken. The determination is usually based on an assessment of the post-mortem interval (time since death) (see below) combined with associated contextual information. In the absence of sufficient information to enable a determination to be made, the default assumption is that the remains are of medico-legal significance. Appropriate procedures should be followed until this can be proven otherwise.

4.2.6 Estimating the Minimum Post-mortem Interval / Time Since Death

While information about the circumstances and the environment where the remains were located is essential when conducting an estimation of the time since death, attempting to provide an estimation of the post-mortem interval based on a visual assessment of human skeletal remains is problematic due to the potential for variation in a large number of extrinsic (e.g., environmental) and intrinsic (e.g., physical) factors. The forensic anthropologist

may not be able to estimate the time since death due to any number of complex interactions between variables, as well as specific known or unknown factors of each case. As such, the forensic anthropologist should be aware of the use of scientific methods for estimating the time since death, such as stable and radioactive isotope analysis, including bomb-pulse dating. Where such methods are available and accessible, these should be utilised in preference to a visual/circumstantial assessment.

4.2.7 Reconstructing or Developing a Biological Profile

The biological profile is an estimation of an individual's age-at-death, biological sex, population affinity (or ancestry), and stature. The biological profile is usually developed in the initial stages of an examination and is used to assist investigators to include or exclude potential victims or missing persons from their investigation. A biological profile should be created using morphological and/or metric techniques that are based on peer-reviewed published methods. Where methods are population specific (i.e., stature methods are developed for specific ancestral groups) the relevant population should be used [8]. Where applicable, the statistical reliability of a method should be acknowledged. Various skeletal elements may be used for the biological profile. The elements used will depend on the preservation of the remains and the types of methods available for those elements. In cases where macroscopic examinations are not sufficient, scientific testing, such as genetic analyses, may assist in providing phenotypical characteristics and or population affinity, while stable isotope analysis may provide geographical provenancing information. Unique individuating features, where present, should also be noted and recorded to provide supplementary secondary identifiers to assist with a positive identification or exclude a person from the investigation.

4.2.8 Analysis and Interpretation of Skeletal Trauma

The analysis of skeletal trauma requires a detailed description of all skeletal defects. The interpretation of those defects then involves establishing when they occurred, that is, if they occurred before the person died (ante-mortem injury/disease), around the time of death (peri-mortem), or if they are the result of environmental or cultural modifications after death (post-mortem damage) [9].

In cases of peri-mortem trauma, an anthropologist may provide an opinion, where possible, about:

- the likely mechanism/s of trauma (blunt, sharp, projectile, blast);
- whether there is polytrauma;
- the direction of the force;
- the minimum number and sequence of impacts, where possible, and
- the features of the implement that caused the traumatic defect, where possible.

Caution is urged not to over interpret trauma. For example, it may be possible to comment on broad details (e.g., class characteristics) about the implement that caused the injury, but it would be unacceptable to individualise a tool. Further assessment of implement interpretation should be done in conjunction with a forensic tool mark examiner and a forensic pathologist.

4.3 BIAS

Forensic anthropologists, like forensic pathologists and other medical specialties, typically require contextual information to effectively interpret examination findings. Practitioners are, however, potentially vulnerable to cognitive and confirmation bias in some aspects of their examinations (e.g., information about the personal effects located with skeletal remains may influence the estimation of sex). Mitigating the effects of bias may be achieved through acknowledging in the report all contextual information that has been provided as well having the report peer reviewed. Sequential unmasking of information (where the anthropologist is provided information at various stages of the examination is a sound practice in principle but is often not achievable due to anthropologists often being sole practitioners with insufficient colleagues to vet and provide the information.

4.4 REPORTING

Statements and reports should consider the inclusion of the following content (noting that some jurisdictions will have varying requirements regarding reporting):

Overall documentation:

- Qualifications and experience comprehensively set out at the beginning of a report
- Case reference number
- Contact details of the investigator/specialist responsible for the case
- Statement about the continuity of all evidence (if appropriate to the case)
- Page numbers on every page
- Unique identification of the report on every page
- Signature of the author on the final page

Anthropology examination:

- Description of the circumstances of the case (and, if applicable, the scope of the assessment)
- Details of whether the scene was attended
- Time and date of the examination/s
- Location of the mortuary/laboratory examination
- Items identified and collected as evidence (including items not examined)
- Detailed description of observations, referencing methods used (appendices can be utilised to include detailed methodology and results; or photographs, maps or drawings, as appropriate)
- Statement of any conclusions or opinions including uncertainty

4.5 DATABASES

There are several freely available databases available which may be used to assist in aspects of developing a biological profile. Such databases include, but are not limited to:

- CranID – www.archaeology.digital/cranid/
- FORDISC 3.1 - <https://fac.utk.edu/fordisc>
- MorphoPASSE – www.morphopasse.com
- Osteomics - <https://osteomics.com/>
- Osteoware - www.naturalhistory.si.edu/research/anthropology/programs/repatriation-office/osteoware

It should be remembered that the utility of such databases will be population specific and may contain inherent errors or limitations. Users should be familiar with the source data and apply the software and interpret results appropriately.



5 PROCEDURES, PROTOCOLS AND VALIDATION

5.1 PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOLS

Each laboratory should have Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) tailored to undertaking forensic anthropology case work specifically in their medico-legal institution and their jurisdiction. For laboratories that are, or seek to be, accredited, the SOPs also need to encompass sufficient details of case work protocol to be acceptable to accrediting organizations (e.g., National Association of Testing Authorities – NATA [10]).

The SOPs need to document the full anthropological process for that laboratory. A detailed SOP will include all the sections of 1-3 in this document. Broadly these comprise:

- The types of cases anthropologists may examine;
- The equipment that will be used;
- The methodologies that will be used for recovery and examination (methods may be broadly referred to or specific methods may be referenced);
- The time frame for examinations
- The peer-review process

5.2 VALIDATION

Methods applied to forensic anthropology casework should be well established and accepted in peer-reviewed literature, and appropriate to the (presumptive) target population.

It is recommended all reports be peer reviewed. Peer review should comprise a technical review (e.g., for fact-checking and for checking typographical or transcription errors) and a content review to ensure that the report is of an appropriately rigorous standard and that descriptions and conclusions are appropriate).



6 QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The laboratory shall establish, follow, and maintain a documented quality management system that is appropriate to the testing activities of, and is equivalent to what is required by, these minimum requirements.

The laboratory shall document, maintain, and follow procedures regarding:

- Proficiency tests;
- Competency tests;
- Document control;
- Standard Operating Procedures;
- Analytical results;
- Sample/exhibit continuity records/chain of custody;
- Sample receipt;
- Processing records;
- Case file management
- Sample retention and disposal;
- Corrective action;
- Audits;
- Training records;
- Continuing professional development;
- Court testimony monitoring, and
- Educational background.

The quality system should specify and document the responsibility, authority, and interrelation of all personnel who manage, perform, or verify work affecting the validity of the anthropology analysis. The system should be reviewed annually and documented.



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