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# **OSAC 2024-S-0016**

## **Standard for Case File Management and Reporting in Forensic Anthropology**

Forensic Anthropology Subcommittee  
Medicine Scientific Area Committee (SAC)  
Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science



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## DRAFT OSAC Proposed Standard

# OSAC 2024-S-0016 Standard for Case File Management and Reporting in Forensic Anthropology

Prepared by  
Forensic Anthropology Subcommittee  
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### Disclaimer:

This OSAC Proposed Standard was written by the Forensic Anthropology of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science following a process that includes an [open comment period](#). This Proposed Standard will be submitted to a standard developing organization and is subject to change.

There may be references in an OSAC Proposed Standard to other publications under development by OSAC. The information in the Proposed Standard, and underlying concepts and methodologies, may be used by the forensic-science community before the completion of such companion publications.

Any identification of commercial equipment, instruments, or materials in the Proposed Standard is not a recommendation or endorsement by the U.S. Government and does not imply that the equipment, instruments, or materials are necessarily the best available for the purpose.

To be placed on the OSAC Registry, certain types of standards receive a Scientific and Technical Review (STR). The STR process is vital to OSAC's mission of generating and recognizing scientifically sound standards for producing and interpreting forensic science results. The STR shall provide critical and knowledgeable reviews of draft standards to ensure that the published methods that practitioners employ are scientifically valid, and the resulting claims are trustworthy.

The STR consists of an independent and diverse panel, which may include subject matter experts, human factors scientists, quality assurance personnel, and legal experts as applicable. The selected group is tasked with evaluating the proposed standard based on a defined list of scientific, administrative, and quality assurance based criteria.

61 For more information about this important process, please visit our website  
62 at: [https://www.nist.gov/organization-scientific-area-committees-forensic-science/scientific-](https://www.nist.gov/organization-scientific-area-committees-forensic-science/scientific-technical-review-str-process)  
63 [technical-review-str-process](https://www.nist.gov/organization-scientific-area-committees-forensic-science/scientific-technical-review-str-process)

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100 **Foreword**

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102 The Forensic Anthropology Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees  
103 (OSAC) under the guidance of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)  
104 recognizes that the clear, concise, and accurate reporting of forensic test results, which is  
105 supported by the proper management of technical records, are integral to the medicolegal and  
106 justice systems. This document is intended to assist practitioners when documenting, recording,  
107 and reporting with regard to forensic anthropology casework. Using documents initially  
108 published by the Scientific Working Group of Forensic Anthropology (SWGANTH), the  
109 subcommittee has reformatted the best practice guideline into a standard following the Academy  
110 Standards Board requirements. This document also incorporates recommendations put forth in  
111 the *Guidance for OSAC Subcommittee Drafting and Updating Standard on Reports and Testimony*.

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130 **Keywords:** *technical records, administrative records, reporting, forensic anthropology*

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170 **Standard for Case File Management and Reporting in Forensic Anthropology**

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172 **1 Scope**

173

174 This standard establishes procedures for the creation, retention, and disposition of technical  
175 records and the reporting of results for forensic anthropological examinations.

176

177 This standard applies to all forensic anthropology service providers regardless of the number of  
178 personnel or the extent of the scope of testing.

179

180 This standard does not imply that terminology, definitions, or reports provided prior to its  
181 effective date that may differ from that set forth within this document were erroneous,  
182 incorrect, or indefensible.

183

184 **2 Normative References**

185 None.

186 **3 Terms and Definitions**

187 For the purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

188

189 **3.1**

190 **administrative review**

191 An evaluation of the report and supporting documentation for consistency with organizational  
192 policies and for editorial correctness.

193

194 **3.2**

195 **amended report**

196 A report used to document any subsequent modifications, particularly those that affect or correct  
197 an original result or interpretation.

198

199 **3.3**

200 **case file**

201 Compilation of all technical records, administrative material (e.g., submission, supporting,  
202 review, or tracking records), and a copy of the issued report for a specific case investigation.

203

204 **3.4**

205 **data**

206 Information collected to be examined, considered, and/or used to help decision-making.

207

208

209

- 210 **3.5**  
211 **field notes**  
212 A record of original observations that consists of any examination documentation created or used  
213 during scene processing; may include written notes, maps/diagrams, photography, videography,  
214 digital scanning, and sketches.  
215
- 216 **3.6**  
217 **interpretation**  
218 Explanations for observations, data, and calculations.  
219
- 220 **3.7**  
221 **observation**  
222 Recognizing and noting an occurrence.  
223
- 224 **3.8**  
225 **opinion**  
226 View, judgment, belief – takes into consideration other information in addition to observations,  
227 data, calculations and interpretations.  
228
- 229 **3.9**  
230 **preliminary results**  
231 Results of examination(s) that have not yet been subjected to technical review (if applicable) or  
232 are not yet presented in a finalized report.  
233
- 234 **3.10**  
235 **result**  
236 The product of the forensic service provider. The term is broad and includes observations, data,  
237 calculations, interpretations, and opinions.  
238
- 239 **3.11**  
240 **supplemental report**  
241 A report used to document additional work performed with subsequent reporting of results.  
242
- 243 **3.12**  
244 **technical record**  
245 All pertinent items created or used to support findings of a forensic anthropological examination.  
246 Technical records may be field and/or laboratory notes documenting tests undertaken,  
247 photographs and medical imaging forming the basis for analysis or technical conclusions, test  
248 records, antemortem medical and dental records, and other documentation (e.g. bench notes,  
249 inventories, observations, diagrams, sketches, charts).  
250  
251  
252  
253  
254

255 **3.13**

256 **technical review**

257 A qualified second party's evaluation of reports, notes, data, and other documentation to ensure  
258 there is appropriate and sufficient support for the actions, results, conclusions, opinions and  
259 interpretations.

260

261 **3.14**

262 **test record**

263 A record generated or received by a laboratory pertaining to the testing performed. For example,  
264 computer output produced or used in the course of testing (e.g., FORDISC results).

265

266 **4 Requirements**

267 **4.1 General**

268

269 **4.1.1** Documentation (e.g., case file; entry in a tracking system) shall be created for all  
270 examinations, including those not requiring a report (e.g., non-human remains, image  
271 examinations).

272

273 **4.1.2** All case documentation shall be provided based upon discovery request, subpoena, or  
274 other legal procedures.

275

276 **4.2 Procedures**

277

278 **4.2.1 Technical Records**

279

280 **4.2.1.1** Technical records shall be recorded contemporaneously with examination and be  
281 documented in a permanent manner.

282

283 **4.2.1.2** All documentation created during the course of the field recovery and examination shall  
284 be accounted for and organized to ensure completeness of the technical record.

285

286 **4.2.1.3** Technical records shall be authenticated by the practitioner with the following:

287 1. Unique case identifier (e.g., case number)

288 2. Identity of practitioner

289 3. Date(s) of examination

290

291 **4.2.1.4** Technical records, including descriptions of all pertinent data, observations, statistics, or  
292 results, shall be documented in sufficient detail for independent expert review.

293

294 **4.2.1.5** The technical record shall include all test results, even if they are not utilized in the final  
295 analysis or reported conclusions. Additional examples of material that shall be documented in  
296 technical records include:

297 1. Manner of receipt of test items (e.g., FedEx, hand delivery)

298 2. Descriptive identification of all items received



- 299 3. Any abnormal conditions of item(s) upon receipt  
300 4. Documentation of all features relied upon when making an association or conclusion  
301 5. Documentation of substantive consultations  
302 6. Description and justification for any re-analysis, changes to data, or changes to  
303 interpretations made after initial testing of the evidence, including a record of any  
304 features that were not identified in the initial examination of evidence that are  
305 subsequently identified after comparison to antemortem information  
306 7. Documentation of disagreements between analysts occurring during verification and  
307 review that require mediation through laboratory protocols  
308 8. All calculations  
309 9. Any images (e.g. photographs, radiographic documentation, drawings) used for evidence  
310 documentation or as part of a test or examination  
311 10. References consulted in conducting tests, or forming conclusions or opinions  
312

313 **4.2.1.6** Forensic anthropology service providers shall have procedures for making corrections to  
314 technical records such that there is documentation of what was changed, by whom, and when,  
315 including changes made as a result of technical or administrative review (e.g., a single line  
316 strikethrough with initials and date alongside corrections, or electronically tracked changes).  
317

318 **4.2.1.7** When a technical review is conducted, the case file shall contain the name of the technical  
319 reviewer, actions taken, and the dates of these actions.  
320

321 **4.2.1.8** The forensic anthropology service provider shall have policies and procedures for the  
322 compilation, retention, release, and disclosure of technical records. These policies and  
323 procedures shall conform to applicable agency, jurisdictional, and/or state requirements  
324 regarding retention of technical records.  
325

326 **4.2.1.9** When applicable, all technical records shall be retained by the laboratory, institution, or  
327 agency and shall not be considered the property of an individual practitioner.  
328

329 **4.2.1.10** Practitioners, particularly sole practitioners, shall have a plan for the continuity of  
330 technical records that includes the final disposition of records in the event of retirement, death,  
331 or other event that terminates the conducting of forensic services.  
332

333 **4.2.2** Field Notes  
334

335 **4.2.2.1** If the forensic anthropology service provider is responsible for field search and  
336 recovery, field notes shall be treated as technical records.  
337

338 **4.2.2.2** Field notes shall be sufficient to record the context from which evidence was observed  
339 and/or recovered.  
340  
341

342 **4.2.2.3** Field notes may be created using a variety of media including field notebooks,  
343 maps/diagrams, photographs, and sketches.

344

345 **4.2.2.4** Field documentation may also include spatial, contextual, and temporal information  
346 upon which subsequent decisions (e.g., field strategy, methods, techniques, evidence handling)  
347 are made.

348

349 **4.2.3** Reports

350

351 **4.2.3.1** The forensic anthropology service provider shall have policies and procedures  
352 regarding reporting requirements for various types of examinations and various types of  
353 submitted evidentiary items, including those for which no examination or partial examination is  
354 completed (e.g. photo examinations).

355

356 **4.2.3.2** Reports shall be issued to the original requesting party or other parties upon  
357 authorization by the original requesting party.

358

359 **4.2.3.3** Reports shall be clearly written, accurate, unambiguous, objective, and provide  
360 sufficient detail to support the interpretation of the test results.

361

362 **4.2.3.4** Results, opinions, and interpretations provided in the report shall be supported by  
363 scientific or medical data and based on the totality of the information available.

364

365 **4.2.3.5** Reports shall include the method(s) utilized (including version and date when  
366 applicable) in such a manner as to allow a detailed review by another forensic anthropology  
367 service provider.

368

369 **4.2.3.6** Results shall be reported in accordance with any specific instructions associated with  
370 the method(s) utilized.

371

372 **4.2.3.7** Report format (e.g., sections, headings, sequence) and content style (e.g., narrative  
373 vs. tabular) may vary among authors but shall adhere to the policies and procedures established  
374 by the forensic anthropology service provider.

375

376 **4.2.3.8** The author(s) of a report shall have conducted, participated in, observed, or  
377 supervised the testing.

378

379 **4.2.3.9** Administrative Content

380

381 **4.2.3.9.1** Each report shall include the information listed below, if applicable. If omitted from  
382 the report, the information shall be included elsewhere in the case file.

383

1. Title (e.g., Forensic Anthropology Report);

384

2. Name, address, and contact information of the laboratory

385

3. Location where the tests were carried out, if different from the laboratory's address

386

4. Name of requesting party (as applicable)

- 387 5. Any unique case identifier assigned (e.g., requesting party's case number)
- 388 6. Unique identification of the test report (e.g., laboratory number)
- 389 7. Date of report
- 390 8. Date of receipt of test items
- 391 9. Unambiguous descriptive identification of all items received, sampled, examined, or
- 392 tested
- 393 10. All relevant requests made to the unit within a laboratory, including those that were not
- 394 conducted or completed
- 395 11. Indication when the report contains results performed by subcontractors or consultants
- 396 12. Statement that makes it clear that the report does not contain all documentation
- 397 associated with the work performed (e.g., "Supporting documentation is maintained
- 398 separate from this report and is necessary for independent evaluation of the work,
- 399 interpretation of the data, and drawing of conclusions.")
- 400 13. Disposition of evidence (e.g., additional examinations pending, evidence transferred,
- 401 evidence consumed, returned to requesting party, retained)
- 402 14. Page numbers on each page with an indication of the total number of pages for the report
- 403 15. Printed name, title, and signature of author(s) of report and date of signature
- 404 16. Printed name of verifier, if applicable
- 405 17. Printed name of technical reviewer. Otherwise indicate "none" or provide an explanation
- 406 as to why a technical review was not done
- 407

#### 408 **4.2.3.10** Technical Content

409  
410 **4.2.3.10.1** As appropriate and according to the needs of the requesting party, reports shall  
411 contain:

- 412 1. A statement regarding the scope of the work performed
- 413 2. A statement of what was tested
- 414 3. A summary of the method(s) used
- 415 4. A summary of the equipment and materials used (including measurement devices,
- 416 software, and databases)
- 417 5. A description of sampling procedure or strategy (if applicable)

418  
419 **4.2.3.10.2** Reports shall contain a summary of data, observations, calculations, interpretation,  
420 and other information reviewed to develop the reported opinions.

421  
422 **4.2.3.10.3** Results and interpretations shall be organized according to the type(s) of test(s)  
423 performed, such as:

- 424 ● Medicolegal significance
- 425 ● Minimum number of individuals
- 426 ● Biological profile (sex, age, population affinity, stature)
- 427 ● Data relevant to identification
- 428 ● Identification comparison

- 429 ● Pathological conditions
- 430 ● Antemortem trauma
- 431 ● Perimortem trauma
- 432 ● Postmortem alterations
- 433 ● Postmortem interval
- 434 ● Other testing (e.g., isotopes, histological analysis, DNA testing)
- 435 ● Scene recovery

436  
437 **4.2.3.10.4** Additional definitions and guidance on reporting language for specific type(s) of  
438 test(s) or conclusions may be found in relevant individual forensic anthropology standards.

439  
440 **4.2.3.10.5** When the testing method permits, pertinent statistical results, error rates, and  
441 confidence intervals shall be reported.

442  
443 **4.2.3.10.6** When results are “inconclusive”, a clear description of what this result means and the  
444 reason(s) for this result shall be reported.

445  
446 **4.2.3.10.7** If included in the report, interpretations shall be clearly marked, and the basis upon  
447 which they have been made shall be documented. A statement explaining that portions of the  
448 report are opinions or interpretations shall be included.

449  
450 **4.2.3.11** Additional Report Content

451  
452 **4.2.3.11.1** Reports shall include the information listed below, if applicable.

- 453 1. A statement of any deviations in the analytical standard operating procedure (SOP),  
454 normal test procedure, quality assurance procedures, or published method; or any  
455 abnormal environmental or sample conditions that may impact the results
- 456 2. A statement in the event of non-conformities in the performance of the analysis that  
457 includes an indication of how the non-conformities were resolved
- 458 3. An estimation of the known error rate of a qualitative measurements, or a statement that  
459 no information regarding error rates currently exist for that measure
- 460 4. A statement on the estimated uncertainty of measurement, when necessary
- 461 5. A statement on the limitations of databases used
- 462 6. A general limitations statement (e.g. -“The conclusions that can be reached from  
463 anthropological examination of skeletal remains are dependent on the completeness and  
464 condition of the skeletal material as well as the availability and quality of antemortem  
465 information. Results based on fragmentary or poorly preserved material may be  
466 inconclusive”).
- 467 7. Limitation statements for each for specific type(s) of test(s) or conclusion, which may be  
468 found in available relevant forensic anthropology standards
- 469 8. A statement if the forensic anthropology service provider is not accredited in the  
470 discipline reported on, or the procedure used is outside their scope of accreditation

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474 **4.2.3.12** Review of Reports

475

476 **4.2.3.12.1** Administrative and/or technical reviews shall be conducted and documented as  
477 outlined in the forensic anthropology service provider's policies and procedures. The technical  
478 and administrative reviews may be performed by the same qualified person.

479

480 **4.2.3.13** Supplemental and Amended Reports

481

482 Substantive changes and additions to an issued report shall be made only in the form of a  
483 supplemental or amended report.

484

485 **4.2.3.13.1** Supplemental Reports

486

487 A supplemental report documents additional information that becomes available after a report  
488 is issued. The date of the previously issued report shall be referenced. A report containing only  
489 the supplemental findings may be issued and shall conform to this standard.

490

491 **4.2.3.13.2** Amended Reports

492

493 An amended report documents modifications to an issued report. The date of the previously  
494 issued report shall be referenced, and modifications shall be clearly indicated. Amended reports  
495 shall conform to this standard.

496

497 **4.2.3.14** Use of Accreditation Symbols and/or Accrediting Body Names

498

499 Forensic anthropology service providers including accreditation symbols and/or accrediting body  
500 names in their test reports shall ensure there is no misleading or unauthorized representation of  
501 accreditations or accreditation status contained in the report. In the event the report contains  
502 both accredited and non-accredited testing, test results, and/or related content, the non-  
503 accredited material shall be clearly identified.

504

505 **4.2.4** Considerations

506

507 **4.2.4.1** Procedures should be in place to optimize information sequencing and promote  
508 transparency in the decision-making process by mitigating exposure to potentially task-  
509 irrelevant/biasing information (e.g., investigative information for trauma examination,  
510 associated artifacts for biological profile estimation) to the greatest extent possible.

511

512 **4.2.4.2** Dissemination or discussion of preliminary results is permitted provided they are  
513 clearly presented as such. The preliminary results shall be provided with clarification that the  
514 finalized written report is pending and may include changes to the initial findings. When possible,  
515 it is recommended that the practitioner finalizes their report prior to disseminating their findings.

516

517 **4.2.4.3** If applicable, forensic anthropology service providers shall communicate the  
518 disposition of the evidence to the requesting party, preferably in the written report.

519  
520 **4.2.4.4** A case file shall be generated when critically analyzing another practitioner’s case file  
521 for potential legal proceedings. The forensic anthropology service provider shall operate  
522 independently of the requesting party and clearly state to the requesting party and legal  
523 authority the limitations of the review based on the available material.

524  
525 **4.2.4.5** Forensic anthropology service providers shall not:  
526 1. Use ambiguous, biasing, or inflammatory terminology.  
527 2. Provide a conclusion that includes a statistical or numerical degree of probability except  
528 when based on relevant and appropriate data.  
529 3. Assert the cause or manner of death.

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