

# Forensics: The Anatomy Of Crime Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Forensics: The Anatomy Of Crime* gives you an inside look at all the different fields of criminal forensics and their history, showing you how the investigation and evidence-collection of crimes has changed dramatically within the last 200 years, helping us find the truth behind more and more crimes.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



My mom is one of the biggest crime fiction/movie/TV show fans I know. Every Sunday, she and my Dad watch "Tatort" (German for "crime scene"), a very popular show, that's set in a different German state capital each time and she must've read hundreds of crime novels in her lifetime.

Even as a kid, this rubbed off on me, I loved reading Detective Conan mangas (called Case Closed in English), watching the animé for it and even bought a huge, complete Sherlock Holmes book when visiting London in 2008. One of my most important values in life is honesty, so I think trying to uncover the truth where it's hidden naturally captivates me.

There's just something about being presented with a fully formed reality and then slowly unraveling it, tracing it back to its beginnings one by one. If you're intrigued by this too, then you'll love this summary.

Val McDermid's novels have covered my mom's shelves for decades, but she's also written *Forensics: The Anatomy Of Crime*, a non-fiction book about the science that's the lifeblood of her crime stories, explaining all aspects of forensics in great detail.

Here are my 3 favorite takeaways:

1. Forensics works from the outside in.

2. One of the biggest advancements in forensics, fingerprints, were discovered by chance.
3. Computers will help us crack even the toughest cases in the future.

If you're aspiring to decipher clues in your life like Sherlock, then this is for you! Let's figure out forensics!

## Lesson 1: Working from the outside to the inside is a guiding principle of forensics.

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Let's say you light a firecracker on New Year's Eve, a big one that explodes into lots of pieces with a loud bang. The next day, you have to clean up, and because just collecting dirt and throwing it away isn't much fun, you decide to try and piece it back together for fun.

**Note:** Don't ever really try to do that, when I wrote it out I realized it's a horrible idea, because of all the explosives. This is just a thought experiment!

Where would you start? Probably at the place where it exploded, right, because there, the most pieces lie. But that'd be a mistake no forensic scientist would ever make. If you start with the source, you'll automatically make conclusions about the whole picture, which might lead you to miss crucial details.

For example, based on the three big firecracker parts at the sight of the explosion, you might think there can't be more than 15 in total, and will stop looking for more small pieces once you have that many. But **if you work from the outside in**, just collecting *everything* you can find, and then slowly bringing everything back to the source, **you'll get a much more complete picture of what's going on.**

Looking at everything that's on the outside and then slowly working towards the inside is a key principle of forensics. Fire scene investigators, forensic pathologists and bloodstain analysts all do their work this way.

## Lesson 2: The fingerprint system came from Japanese pottery makers.

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Alexander Fleming leaving his Petri dish unprotected for two weeks led to the invention of penicillin. Archimedes had his Eureka! moment in the bathtub and found out how to measure the volume of objects. Many of science's greatest discoveries were originally made by chance, and the now-standard forensic tool of fingerprint identification is no exception.

In the 1870s, Scottish doctor and missionary Henry Faulds set up an English medical mission in Japan, where, on a trip to an archeological site, he discovered you could see some of the marks ancient pottery makers had left on their work in dug up clay fragments. **If you dusted them with powder, they'd become a lot clearer to distinguish.**

After looking at his own fingerprints and some of his friends, he hypothesized they might be unique to each human being, a theory that helped him prove the innocence of one of his staff members when his hospital was broken into. Convinced that his system would help solve crimes, he passed it on to none other than Charles Darwin (you know, the inventor of the desk chair, among other things, who in turn passed it on to statistician Francis Galton.

It took some doing, but after an Argentinian prison started adding fingerprints to all its criminal records, a guy named Edward Henry started using the system in India and bringing it to Scotland Yard, after which it became standard practice.

## Lesson 3: Thanks to the power of computers, the rate of crimes we solve will keep going up.

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The power of computers and the internet permeates everything by now, and of course crime investigation benefits from this as well. Some of the hardest cases to crack are missing children, where only one in six is found thanks to someone identifying a photograph. This is because children's faces aren't fully formed, which makes them hard to distinguish. If you've ever mistaken a young girl for a boy or vice versa, you know what I'm talking about.

However, computers are starting to get really good at facial reconstruction, which uses the 22 bones of the human skull to derive facial features and characteristics. The combined power of CT scans, X-rays and fast iteration of various models, thanks to fast computing, allows investigators to get a picture that closely resembles the victim much quicker.

The first time facial reconstruction played a central role in solving a crime was in 2001, when 5-year old Rowena Rikkers's brutal murder through her parents was solved thanks to a clay reconstruction of her face, based on the bones of her skull.

Let's hope that through the aid of computers, the rate of crimes solved will keep increasing in the future, helping us make further progress towards a crime-free world!

## Forensics: The Anatomy Of Crime Review

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If you like crime novels, thriller movies, or just want to get better at figuring out what's going around you, then *Forensics: The Anatomy Of Crime* is for you. A great related read is *What Every Body Is Saying*. Two thumbs up for this one!

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- Which quote the entire forensics industry is based on
- What part of a fire always survives
- How blowflies help identify the time of death of a corpse
- The exact procedure of an autopsy
- Where toxins are easiest to detect in the body
- How strings help reconstructing bloody murders
- What role forensics played in convicting the “sausage king” of Chicago
- Why your iPhone never really dies
- Which forensic scientists jump in when all else fails
- The hardest challenge forensics faces

## **Who would I recommend the Forensics: The Anatomy Of Crime summary to?**

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The 16 year old, who loves detective stories, the 45 year old stay-at-home mom, who binge reads crime novels in her spare time, and anyone who works in jurisdiction or some type of law-related function.