

Top 10 CSI Tips and Lessons

Here are the best top 10 tips from a real-life Crime Scene Investigator to start thinking like a CSI and get you on track to land the job!

1. **The CSI, The Myth, The Legend:** Understand the CSI Effect. Accept the CSI Effect. The CSI Effect is the outcome when the day-to-day functions of a Crime Scene Investigator are dramatized for television shows such as CSI: Las Vegas. When the public watches these shows and views the exaggeration of crime scene investigation, it creates a negative viewpoint from the public or the perspective of one serving on a jury. This can cause people to make assumptions about details in the case because “that’s not how they did it on TV”. Television dramas continue to inaccurately portray most aspects of crime scene investigations. Familiarize yourself with the CSI Effect and understand that this job is not like what you see on TV. Crimes do not get solved in thirty to forty-five minutes. Nor does the actual crime scene get processed that fast either.
2. **Recon Does The Brain Good:** Save yourself from stress and headaches! Do your research! Research all degree program options in your area. Employers are looking for as much hands-on experience and exposure to the career from potential applicants. While online degree programs are convenient, they do not offer the same level of hands-on activities as in-person courses. Be sure to research your local law enforcement agency's job descriptions. Oftentimes, agencies have a preferred degree or certificate in the job description. An example of this would be a degree in science versus a degree in arts. If that information is not easily found, ask the Crime Scene Unit!
3. **Network, Network, And Network Some More:** Most law enforcement agencies offer a service to the community called a ride-along. A ride-along is when you ride with a police officer or a crime scene investigator during their shift. After a brief background check, you can usually ride along once every 30 days. This opportunity allows you to have firsthand exposure to what being a real-life CSI entails in the field and the office. This is also a great opportunity to start networking. Meet the people, supervisors, and detectives who work in the unit. Showing interest in the position and future coworkers is a great way to build rapport. Showing up shows commitment, and in this competitive line of work, commitment is key! So put yourself out there and make lots of new crime scene friends!
4. **Who The Heck Is Locard?:** Locard’s Exchange principal is the most important principle in the field of forensics. It is the belief that when a suspect enters a scene, they will take something away from the scene and leave something behind. This is most commonly summed up by saying every contact leaves a trace. An example of this is a suspect takes dust away from a surface and leaves behind fingerprints. If you train yourself in this mindset, you will be able to retrace the suspect’s steps and know where to search for possible evidence.
5. **Smile For The Camera:** Photography is key in the role of a crime scene investigator. Learn the basic components of a camera. Know and understand how each camera setting (primarily the aperture, ISO, and shutter speed) affects each other. You’ll also need to know photography concepts such as depth of field and time exposure. Proficiency in photography is critical. While no crime scene is ever the same, photographs are taken at every scene. The largest and most important function of a CSI is documenting the scene and this is done with photography.
6. **Knowledge Is Power:** Seek out forensic-specific training courses. Several forensic training companies allow students to participate in their courses. Tri-Tech Forensics and CSI Academy of Florida are two examples. The International Association for Identification, or the IAI, is a world-renowned forensic organization. There are also branches of membership for each state in the

United States. The IAI offers student membership. Included in the membership is access to free training! Nothing tops free forensic training!

7. **Get Ready, Get Set, Get Sweaty:** One common misconception about the work of a CSI is that the working conditions are nice. The reality of this job couldn't be more opposite. To be a CSI, you must be okay with getting down and dirty. This includes variables such as working in inclement weather to being willing to lay face down on in the dirt to get the perfect photo angle. You must be willing to go into structures that contain biohazards ranging from blood, human tissue, feces, and bug infestation. There is often no air conditioning available, so be prepared to sweat. The ever-changing challenges that this job presents are the largest reason why this profession is most appealing.

8. **Don't Be A Square!:** Creative problem solving is another key component to thinking like a CSI. One great thing about creative problem solving is that it can be exercised in any situation at any given time. Start exercising your brain! Don't take the easiest solution to everyday problems. Allow yourself to be flexible. Take a moment to think of different ways to arrive at the same solution. Working in this field, approaching problems with an open mind is key, so leave that rigid mindset at home!

9. **Understanding Human Anatomy:** Time to pull out that old game of Operation and brush up on your anatomy knowledge. Familiarize yourself with basic medical terminology such as anterior, posterior, prone, and supine. Learn the names and locations of bones and organs. Learn the basic injury terminologies such as laceration, abrasion, and petechiae. Being familiar with these terms is helpful when examining bodies on the scene. Being able to identify how injuries occurred based on their appearance can be extremely helpful when trying to interpret the factors found at a crime scene.

10. **Know Your Limits:** Take some time to evaluate the above tips. This career is both physically and mentally demanding. You must think fast at a moment's notice and be quick on your feet. By using the tips discussed here, you can make sure that this is the job for you and put yourself on the right track to becoming a CSI! By conducting appropriate research and networking, you will be ready to enter this career field without any surprises. While this job is demanding, it is indescribably rewarding in helping achieve justice for people who have been victimized and can no longer speak for themselves.