

A Day in the Life of a CSI

It's difficult to describe a standard day as a CSI, because no two days are the same, and this is the beauty of the role. Not only can your job change from day to day, but it can also change from hour to hour. Also, no two Police Forces are the same and they each have their own policies and procedures regarding what jobs they attend and how they deal with things/prioritise workload, so this narrative is purely from personal experience.

There are, of course, some set routines and procedures in place. The day starts when your shift starts. Yes...that's right, it is shift work! Every police force is different, but it's not unusual to see shift patterns operate between 7/8am up until midnight such as 8am-4pm and 4pm -12 midnight. Thereafter, there is usually an on-call rota system, where you can be called out at any time through the night, for serious category crimes, or any crime that cannot be secured overnight by the police.

First things first – no matter when your shift starts, it is best to get in early and have a cuppa, as you might not get another for the rest of the day! It also gives you opportunity to check the logs, find out what is going on, whether there are any urgent jobs that need prioritising etc, catch up with colleagues from the previous shift, and check your emails. Checking emails can take time, particularly if you are just returning from days off or a holiday. You receive all sorts of enquiries and can expect anything from queries about a job you attended, to case updates, requests for written statements for court, and the most important and often dreaded email...a court summons. Attending court to give evidence is part of the role of a CSI, but thankfully, it's not a daily occurrence.

At the start of any shift, you always log into the system and turn on your police radio, so that Police Officers, the Control room, and colleagues know that you are available for duty. It is also a priority to check your kit. Every CSI has their own practical kit and photography kit. It's up to the individual to take care of it, maintain it and keep it well stocked.

Next comes prioritising workload. This is a must at the beginning of a shift, particularly if there are quite a few jobs on the log. There are several things that will be taken into consideration, such as:

- Seriousness of crime
- Geographical location
- Whether the scene is indoors or outdoors
- The victim – are they vulnerable? Have they been waiting a while already?

Doing this allows you to process scenes more efficiently and deliver a good service to victims of crime.

Whichever jobs you are attending, you will note on the log that you are taking ownership. Effective teamwork and communication are important, particularly at the start of a shift, because you need to prioritise jobs with each other and be clear about who is doing what!

As you can see... there is quite a lot to do even prior to leaving the office to attend a crime scene. Once you are ready to go, you will collect your van keys. Each CSI is usually allocated a van that they will use regularly, and it's often shared with someone on the



opposite shift pattern. Again, it is the CSI's responsibility to maintain the van, so before leaving the Police station vehicle checks should be carried out including:

- Tyre pressure
- Fuel, oil, water etc
- Mileage check
- Stock/kit in the back. It is important to keep a fully stocked van, in addition to the kit you carry by hand.

It's important that the vans are cleaned regularly, inside and out and that they are kept in good condition, because contamination must always be a consideration. Plus, you are out on the road so much it is important to keep your vehicle roadworthy. CSIs do a lot of driving!

Once you have your list of jobs and your kit and van are good, you are ready to go! As a CSI you spend a lot of time working on your own, so it is important that you are competent and happy working independently. You are also responsible for keeping an eye on the logs, communicating with the office and the control room, and reprioritising your workload as other jobs come in.

For example, one day I (Angela) was working a day shift, this for me was 7am-4pm. I started my shift with 8 jobs. This is quite a lot, but it was a Saturday, over a bank holiday weekend and I was starting the day solo, with no teammates until 11am. Thankfully they were not serious crime – they were volume crime, theft from motor vehicle, a couple of burglaries, photographing a victim's injuries etc. I was steadily working my way through and all was peaceful, until three serious crimes came onto the log - a robbery, followed by a suicide, then a serious assault. As a result, I had to rearrange my entire workload and put some of my original jobs on the back burner and hand them over to the next shift. I remember this day so well because it turned out to be particularly stressful.

This is not unusual as a CSI, one minute you can be at a shoplifting scene, next thing, you are called to the scene of a murder. For anyone wondering about the three serious crimes, my priority was the suicide. The first thing I did was get on the radio and speak to the First Officers in attendance (FOA) at each of those scenes, to find out more detail/circumstances prior to making any decisions. As a CSI, it is important you have a full picture of what is going on before jumping into a scene.

When making my decision, part of my process was as follows...I had very few details about the assault to go on. A Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) had not been appointed and there were only brief details from a Police Constable (PC). Further, the victim had been seriously injured and we did not know whether they would live or die. This is significant as if the victim dies, it then becomes a murder investigation, therefore, you do not want to enter the scene until you know exactly what you are dealing with.

The robbery had occurred inside a shop. The scene was contained, and the Police were making initial enquiries. The suicide however was outside and in a public space, so it was important to attend this first to deal with it quickly. When attending suicides, we do not go with the foregone conclusion that it is suicide, we keep an open mind and check the body



for anything suspicious, to ensure there is no foul play. It's always important to approach every scene with an open mind and not be subject to cognitive influence or bias. We also take photographs of the scene and the victim for the coroner, to help in determining cause and manner of death. Photography being one of the key skills a CSI must have.

You will be pleased to know that serious category crime such as murder, robbery etc are not a daily occurrence, they don't happen that frequently and you spend a lot of time as a CSI, dealing with volume crimes. Things such as burglaries to homes, businesses, sheds, allotments etc, damage and theft from motor vehicles.

There are some boring days as a CSI, some where there is little crime going on (this is always the hope but if you are a CSI, it leaves you a little redundant, lol), or the jobs you are attending are similar e.g., there has been a spate of damage to motor vehicles.

The important thing to note is that it is nothing like on the TV. It's not glamorous by any stretch of the imagination. You drive around in a transit van (some forces have marked vans, others plain). You wear Police issue combat trousers, polo T-shirt and steel-toe capped boots as standard. You add PPE before entering any scene and in serious category crime scenes, you will be unrecognisable in full PPE (white suit (hood up), hair net, mask, overshoes, and gloves). And most days, you get filthy.... everything from mud, soot, fingerprint powder to the more gross stuff (listen to our full CSI careers interview at <https://csitrainingandevents.com/careers-series/> to hear the perfect example).

There is no doubt however, that even without the glamour, it is a great job. Particularly when you help and reassure a victim of crime or find a key piece of evidence to progress the investigation!

As a CSI you thoroughly record every scene that you attend, using contemporaneous (taken at the time) notes and photographs. Once you have attended as many jobs in a day as you can, it is time to head back to the office. Then the fun begins. Now it's time to start processing your jobs, ensuring all your notes are entered onto force systems, dealing with your memory cards and images from each job, moving all exhibits into appropriate storage, making notes for continuity re. where you have stored it, completing paperwork to send any items off that you want analysing, preparing statements for court, dealing with emails, updating the next shift etc. The list is long.

When processing your cases, you must consider what exhibits you will send away for analysis from each scene. This rationale is known as a Forensic Strategy. The larger a case and the more evidence available, the more detailed a forensic strategy will be. In major investigations the strategy becomes a collaborative effort between Crime Scene Managers (CSM) and Senior Investigating Officer (SIO). However, on smaller cases, a CSI automatically carries out a Forensic Strategy and this is because not all exhibits recovered are automatically sent for analysis.

There are a several considerations when deciding which exhibits will be sent for analysis including:

- The points that you are trying to prove in the case.
- The circumstances of the incident.

- The location the evidence was recovered from.
- Whether any arrests have been made.
- Cost of analysis and budget constraints.

You want to send items which are most likely to progress the investigation, but you also need to be mindful of budgets. For example, fingerprints are examined internally rather than sent to an external private laboratory, unlike DNA. Therefore, fingerprints are less costly to analyse, so, if you recovered fingerprints and DNA from the same location, you would send the fingerprints for analysis first and await the results, prior to sending the DNA (unless you believed that there was more than one perpetrator involved). Given the correct storage you always have the option to send the DNA samples later if required. This process might seem complicated, but as a CSI, it quickly becomes second nature.

So, as you can see there's so much more to a "Day in the Life of a CSI" than just attending crime scenes... and in reality, we've just scratched the surface!

We've covered what a standard day can look like, but this is without considering other duties such as going to a post-mortem, attending court, taking part in a major investigation etc. As mentioned at the beginning... no two days are the same and this is the beauty of the role!

Thank you for reading:

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