



## HINTS FOR VALIDATING IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS

How do you know if a legal document or certificate is valid or fraudulent? There are a few clues to look for:

- Forgers know that few law enforcement officers, banks or public clerks go to the trouble of researching the legitimate prototypes of city seals and hospital certificates. Verification is especially difficult because document designs and clerks' signatures vary throughout the years. It's time-consuming, but visiting the websites of municipalities and hospitals might allow you a look at the legitimate institution letterhead or seal to check against the document under scrutiny.
- If the document is from a past era, look to see if the paper is aged. However, it's not worthwhile becoming an antique paper expert to catch forgeries this way. Expert forgers will know how to age paper. A really good one will research the proper paper size, weight, and design of an original document. Some will shop antique stores to buy old typewriters from the same period. An easy trick to foil an amateur forger of an old document is to inspect the ink type. Documents prior to the 1950s will be signed with ink pens. Only after this period did ball point pens become popular in usage.
- When examining notary seals and embossed documents, read the engraving carefully. Not all modern notarized documents will be stamped with an embossed (crimped) seal, since it is no longer required in some states to do so. It's more expensive to purchase the crimping tool, so most notaries public don't go to the expense if they don't have to. But when inspecting the seal, flat or raised, read its language. Sloppy forgers will bet that no one will actually read what it says on the seal or research whether it is authentic. The more clever forgers, however, will fabricate their own replica seal. They may use a silver dollar or a novelty engraved coin from an amusement park as a mold for the seal. In order not to be discovered, they will crimp the fake seal poorly so that the impression is almost illegible. Be suspicious of incomplete and illegible seals.
- Forgers prefer to make fake abstract records of birth cards instead of doctoring original 'long form' hospital birth certificates. It's hard for them to fabricate authentic-looking paper and replicate the original ink effect. Be more suspicious of 'short form' birth certificate cards.