Indicators of Deception in Written Statements

- Framing actions in the passive voice could be a way to displace blame. ("The gun was loaded" instead of "I loaded the gun.")

- Shifting pronouns. Switching from "I" to another person can also displace blame. ("I woke up on the ground…You know how it is when you drink a little too much…")

- Personal disassociation when relating the critical moment of the event. (I don't know what happened; it was like in a dream.")

- Ambiguity in actions. (Saying "I decided to go home," "I always go home at that time," or "I needed to go home," instead of saying "I went home.")

- Switching from a past tense narrative to the present. (We got in the car, then we see a homeless man come up and he asks us for some money…")

- Answering a question with a question. This can be a delay tactic giving the suspect time to think of a reasonable explanation. ("What makes you think that?" "Why would I do something like that?")

- Imprecise modifiers like 'maybe,' 'I think,' 'could' and 'might.' ("I guess it was about midnight.") This allows some 'wiggle room' to change details later if proven to be false.

- Using euphemisms, like somebody "went missing," or "I laid down the law" instead of "I beat her up," or I "borrowed" their car. Be careful not to hold weak speakers of English to a native speaker's standard since they may not have the ability to manipulate nuances in the language.

- Lack of specific details. The more detailed the account, the better the chance the suspect is drawing from experience rather than fantasy. If he or she is making up any detail, they run a risk of having their testimony contradicted.

- Imbalance between the parts to a story. A statement usually describes what happened before the event in question, during the event (on average, 60% of a typical statement), and afterward. If details are sketchy in the middle, for example, there may be intentional omissions.

- Abnormally short or long sentences. If a sentence doesn't match the average length of the other sentences, treat it as idea or emotion very important to the interviewee.

- Extraneous information. Examine why the stray, random details were included…to displace blame? …to redirect attention? …to pad the story, giving the appearance of candor while glossing over the pertinent facts?