

DNA

The use of fingerprints as evidence revolutionized criminal investigations. However, the discovery of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) has been the most important advance in criminal science so far. DNA is a chemical that is present in every cell of the body. A tiny sample of skin, blood, saliva or a single hair will provide investigators with all the material they need.

The DNA sample is taken from the nucleus of a cell. It is cut into smaller sections, processed, and then photographed with X-ray film. This information is then stored on a computer database. These DNA samples look like a supermarket bar code. Every person has a unique DNA—apart from identical twins. Therefore, DNA samples

can be used to identify criminals or their victims.

DNA sampling is now being used to reexamine criminal cases that took place before DNA profiling was possible. It can provide new information and evidence. Sometimes guilty people are revealed and arrested. On other occasions, convicted people have been found to be innocent, and they have been released from prison.

DNA profiling is also widely used by animal detectives to uncover animal smugglers and poachers. In Oregon, USA, the first laboratory in the world dedicated to solving wildlife crimes now deals with about 900 cases every year. DNA evidence has become a major weapon in the war against animal abuse.

DNA Fact File

DNA stands for...	
DNA is found in...	
DNA is not unique in...	
DNA is useful in old criminal cases because...	
The advantages of DNA over fingerprints are...	