

BEN LANGDON: Forensic Scientist

On popular crime drama series like CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, the latest scientific methods are used to collect and analyse physical evidence and solve horrible crimes in record time. But just how realistic is all this? We interviewed 26-year-old Ben Langdon to find out what the job of a forensic scientist is really like.

So, Ben ... is your job anything like what we see on CSI?

Well ... mostly no! On the show, investigators seem to end every work day with a dramatic arrest, but sometimes our cases aren't solved for months. Also, on CSI you see that everything is being done by one or two people. They go to the crime scene, do DNA analysis, then go and arrest the suspect. In reality, a lot of different specialised technicians, forensic scientists, and detectives are involved in each case. I specialise in fibres and blood analysis, but others look at fingerprints, footwear, and many other things.

So what's a typical day like for you, Ben?

There's no typical day because every case is different. A few days ago, I examined some evidence that had been collected from a crime scene. A ski mask had been found after an armed robbery at a pizzeria, so I had to search it for hair, blood, and saliva. When a stain was found, I used chemicals to remove the DNA from it and then I had the DNA compared to samples from the suspects. Another time recently, I spent two whole days searching for fibres in a car. Sometimes, I might even be asked to present my evidence in court in front of a judge.

Can you tell us a little about the equipment and scientific methods you use?

Sure. As well as ordinary microscopes, we use powerful electron microscopes. We also use ultraviolet light to see traces of evidence like tiny fibres and spectrometers which identify chemicals. Our techniques are becoming more high-tech all the time. Soon, we will have a kind of 'lab on a chip'. DNA will be identified simply by putting a tiny amount of fluid on a silicon chip.

Finally, what are the best and the worst parts of your job?

Well, this job definitely isn't for everyone. Some crime scenes can be very distressing. On the other hand, it's wonderful when a case has been solved and your evidence played a role in that. You get to help the community, and that's a great feeling.

2 The text is about a forensic scientist. Read the questions in the article. Can you answer them? 

So, Ben ... is your job anything like what we see on CSI?  

So what's a typical day like for you, Ben?  

Can you tell us a little about the equipment and scientific methods you use?  

Finally, what are the best and the worst parts of your job?  

3 Read again and complete the sentences. 

1 Ben Langdon works as 

2 A case can take 

3 Ben's specialised 

4 Ben searched the mask for 

5 Ben got the DNA from the mask 

6 At work, forensic scientists use 

.....

7 Ben likes his job because 

.....

4 a) Match the highlighted words in the text to their meanings: ...

evidence	name	=	
in record time	normal	=	
solved	carrying a weapon	=	
suspect	answered	=	
armed	proof	=	
samples	upsetting	=	
ordinary	very small amounts	=	
traces	specimens	=	
identify	person police believes is guilty of a crime	=	
distressing	faster than ever before	=	

solve	crime	blood
ultraviolet	record	silicon

Make sentences about Ben using the completed phrases.

👂 Listen and check.

1		crimes	...	4		scene
2	in		time	...	5	light
3			analysis	...	6	chip