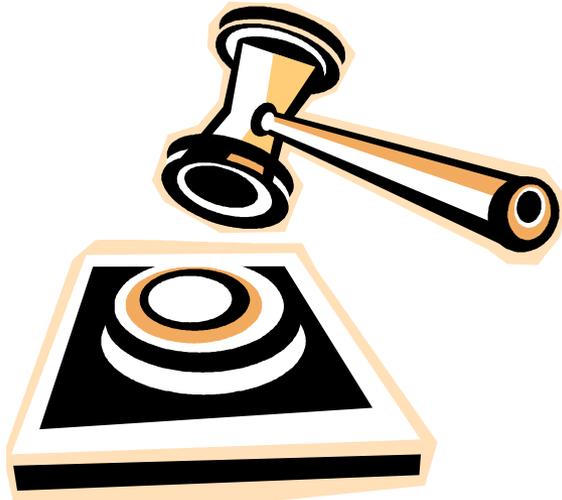


Eyewitness Basics



*Pros & Cons of
Testimonial Evidence*

ONLINE VERSION

What is testimonial evidence?

Testimonial evidence includes oral or written statements given to police as well as testimony in court by people who witnessed an event.

Eyewitness accounts can be a useful tool in helping investigators with analyzing crime scenes, but are not viewed to be highly reliable. In addition, eyewitness identifications (right or wrong) can have a big influence on the outcome of an investigation or trial.

People are likely to view the same scene in different ways depending on their positions, line of sight, familiarity with the area, and other factors that can interfere with a person's ability to remember details.

Did you know?

According to The Innocence Project (2008) "Eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions nationwide, playing a role in more than 75% of convictions overturned through DNA testing." Still, the criminal justice system profoundly relies on eyewitness identification and testimony for investigating and prosecuting crimes (Wells & Olson, 2003).

What factors affect a person's memory and their ability to identify a suspect?

Witness Factors

How could these factors affect what a person remembers?

Age – The witness' age may play a role in how much they can remember or how accurate their descriptions of a crime might be

Drugs/Alcohol – The use of illegal drugs and alcohol may impair a person's ability to recall specific details of a crime or the suspect.

Other People – Listening to other versions of the crime from other eyewitnesses or the media may influence what an eyewitness thinks he/she remembers

Crime Scene & Suspect Factors

How could these factors affect what a person remembers?

Type of Crime – The more violent the crime, the more difficult it might be for an eyewitness or victim to recall specific events or characteristics of the crime scene or suspect.

Length of Crime (Interaction) – The longer an eyewitness is able to view a suspect or crime scene, the more likely he/she is to remember specific details.

Appearance – A suspect who is very attractive or very unattractive will be easier to remember. Suspects with facial scars, piercings, or tattoos will also be easier to identify.

Time of Day – The amount of daylight or other light available may impact what an eyewitness can see.

Facial Composites

Investigators work with sketch artists and eyewitnesses to create **facial composites**, or sketches of a person's face. Today many police departments are using facial reconstruction software to help them with this task.

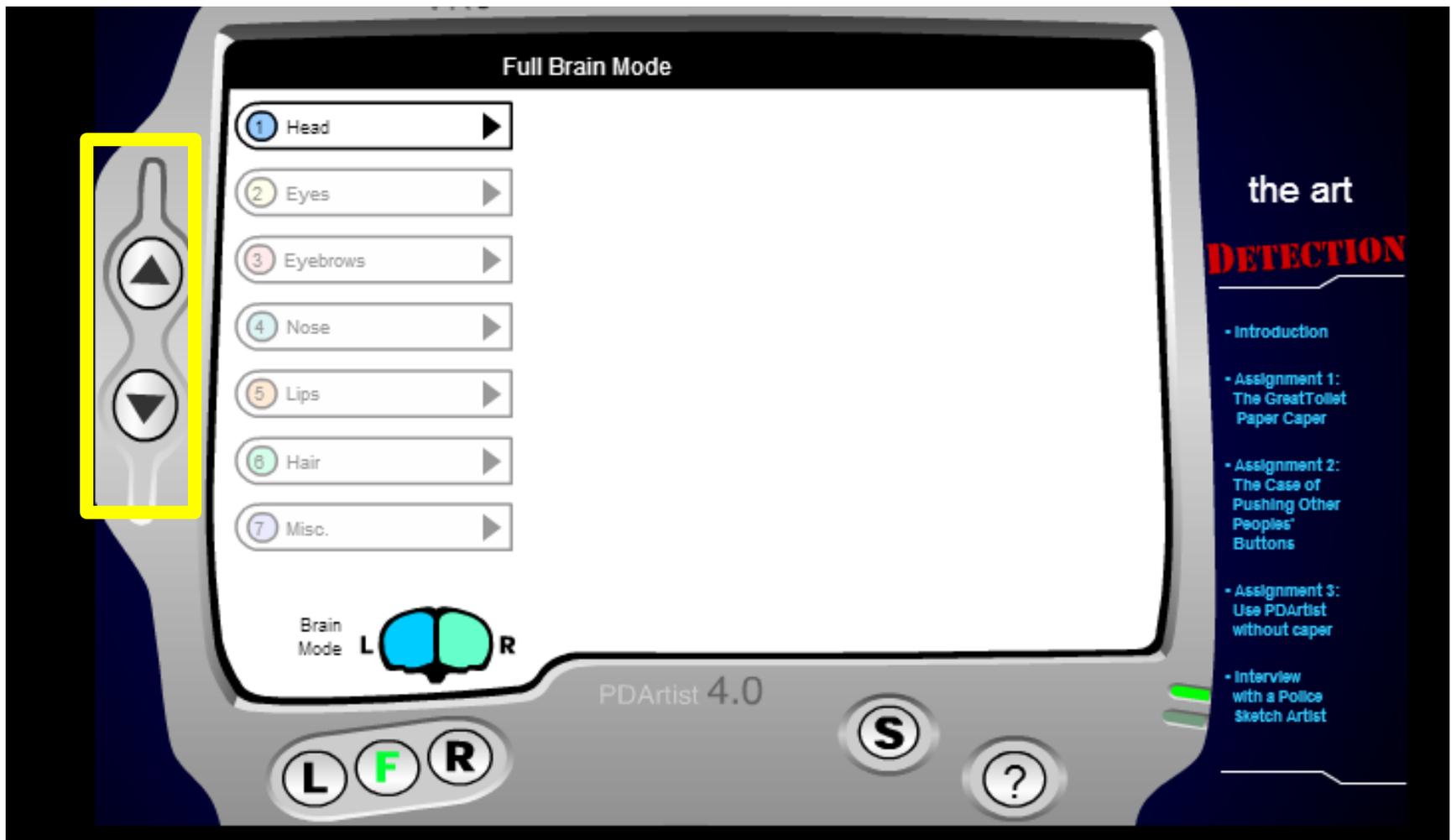
The composite may be used **internally** to assist officers in identifying the suspect or used **externally** through local media (radio, TV, and newspaper) to solicit leads from citizens.



FACES – A software program that offers many options to help you recreate a person's facial features.

Back of worksheet – Go to mrstomm.com → Science Spot Kid Zone and then choose Forensic Science Page 1 to find the Eyewitness Basics links.

Art of Crime Detection – Use the arrows to move up and down the list. Click S to submit your composite and find out if you are correct (or close enough).



You will have a chance to try to create a facial composite. You will need to pay close attention to the following features:

The shape of the face

The shape of the jaw

The shape of the eyes

The shape of the nose

The width of the neck

The shape & protrusion of the ears

The presence of facial piercing

The presence of facial hair, its color, & location

The presence of facial markings, such as scars or tattoos

Forehead or other facial lines

The presence of eyeglasses or sunglasses

The length, color, & texture of the person's hair



Let's give it a try!