DIGITAL INNOCENCE INITIATIVE

SWGDE Quick Reference

How defense attorneys and investigators can begin using recognized digital-evidence practices

START HERE: You do not need to memorize SWGDE publications or become a forensic examiner. Use them to identify expected practices, request the underlying material, ask informed questions, and recognize when qualified assistance is needed.

What SWGDE Is

The Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence (SWGDE) publishes consensus-based standards, requirements, best practices, guidelines, technical notes, positions, and considerations for digital and multimedia evidence.

IMPORTANT: A SWGDE publication can provide a recognized practice baseline, but it is not automatically binding law, a universal standard of care, or a substitute for case-specific forensic analysis.

Use It on the Next Case

1. **Identify.** Define the evidence type and the question that must be answered.
2. **Locate.** Find the relevant published SWGDE document; use the Toolbox to narrow the search.
3. **Verify.** Record the title, document number, version, issue date, and publication status.
4. **Compare.** Compare the disclosed work and documentation with the practices and limitations addressed.
5. **Act.** Use gaps to focus discovery, consultation, independent review, and expert-retention decisions.

Useful Starting Areas

- Preservation, handling, collection, and acquisition
- Computers, mobile devices, cloud data, and online content
- Video, imagery, photography, and audio
- Historical location and telecommunications evidence
- Quality systems, validation, reporting, competency, and testimony

How Awareness Helps the Defense

- Frame discovery requests for source data, forensic files, logs, notes, validation material, and supporting documentation.
- Evaluate collection, acquisition, examination, analysis, reporting, limitations, and whether independent review is possible.

Five Questions to Ask

1 PRESERVATION Was the original evidence preserved, protected from avoidable alteration, and documented through collection, handling, and custody?

2 METHOD Were the collection, acquisition, examination, and analysis methods appropriate for this evidence and this question?

3 VALIDATION Were the tools and methods tested or validated, with versions, settings, logs, known limitations, and deviations documented?

4 INDEPENDENT REVIEW Are the underlying data, forensic files, provider returns, metadata, notes, and interpretive documentation available—not merely screenshots, maps, summaries, or conclusions?

5 REPORTING Does the report disclose scope, assumptions, uncertainty, limitations, alternative explanations, and the basis for each conclusion?

Request the Underlying Material

Seek native or original records, forensic images or extraction files, databases, project files, logs, notes, tool and version information, settings, validation material, provider documentation, mapping files, and the source material supporting each conclusion.

Verify the Current Version

PUBLICATIONS CHANGE: A document may be revised, replaced, superseded, archived, or released only as a draft. Confirm its title, number, version, issue date, and status before relying on it. Follow the publication's use and attribution requirements.

When to Seek Qualified Assistance

Obtain qualified assistance when the issue requires technical preservation, forensic acquisition, examination, recovery, specialized interpretation, method evaluation, or testimony—or involves a locked, damaged, altered, inaccessible, or incompletely extracted device.

Recognize the issue early enough to preserve what remains and obtain assistance while it can still be effective.

Start With the Toolbox

Current SWGDE publications: swgde.org/documents/current-documents/
Drafts for comment: swgde.org/documents/draft-released-for-comment/
Digital Evidence Toolbox: digitalevidencetoolbox.com
Presentation resources: digitalinnocenceinitiative.org