



Firearms FAQs

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1. General minimum educational requirements for your section:

- As a Firearm Examiner, you must possess at minimum a Bachelor's degree or higher in a science or engineering field from an accredited university (must include a statistics course). You then must complete 2 years of internal or external training and obtain licensure from the Texas Forensic Science Commission within 6 months of the start date.
- As a NIBIN technician, you must possess a Bachelor's degree in a natural science, forensic science, criminal justice, or a closely related field from an accredited university and obtain licensure from the Texas Forensic Science Commission within 6 months of the start date.

2. What advice would you offer someone considering this career path?

- While completing your studies, it is advised to acquire exposure to a forensic science laboratory through an internship or other means and rotate through each section in order to experience each department's day-to-day activities. Pay special attention to educational requirements necessary to work in your field of interest. For example, criminal justice degrees alone may not satisfy this requirement. Prior to applying for a position, fine tune your resume for the department in which you are most interested.

3. Besides a degree(s), what other things does HFSC look for in future analysts in this section?

- HFSC expects each of its analysts to exhibit ethical behavior, integrity, dutifulness, and a desire to learn, willing to improve oneself and the department. Self-reflection, strong behavioral attributes, and emotional intelligence hold great importance. Specific to the firearms department, previous knowledge of firearms is not necessary as internal training programs exist to develop the knowledge.

4. What is a typical day/week like for a forensic analyst in this section?

- A typical day is never typical. We receive urgent requests for casework, court priorities, and officer involved shootings that need to be handled quickly, such that our regular casework may need to be set aside. Regular casework involves receiving evidence into custody, possible comparisons of cartridge cases and/or bullets, function testing firearms, and producing test fires.

5. Is it typical to work overtime? How often?

- The usual working hours are Monday through Friday, 8AM to 5PM, with limited overtime required.

6. How often do analysts in this section appear in court to testify?

- It varies, depending on how many cases an examiner has worked in their careers, court backlog, and types of cases worked.

7. How important is communication in the daily function of your job?

- Communication is of utmost importance in this role. Clear and concise reporting is required when communicating with investigators and members of the court system. Conveying relevant deadline details with management and fellow analysts is a must. Additionally, a large portion of this role is the giving and receiving of feedback on case records and documentation between analysts.

8. In your opinion, what do you think is the most challenging part of your occupation?

- The most challenging part of this role is that it never ends. Cases can be closed, completed, and testified on but there is always the next case. Recently, firearm examination has come under criticism, and in court, it is challenging to defend this, especially if the testimony request is last minute. Testimony preparations are time consuming and daunting. It must be kept in perspective that as an analyst, you are making life and death decisions regarding someone's life.

9. What advancement opportunities are available in your line of work?

- Furthering your education by obtaining an advanced degree and/or a certification through the Association of Firearm and Toolmark Examiners (AFTE) while participating in research will help you to develop your skills and knowledge base. With this experience, opportunities in technical and supervisory roles become available as well as opportunities in other departments (i.e. assessors, Lean Six Sigma, initiatives at HFSC).

10. What is a common misconception people have about your job?

- In general, the CSI effect has created the biggest misconception for forensic science. Unlike shows, such as CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, cases aren't solved in an hour, we don't question suspects, and we don't go to scenes. We are only given firearms related evidence for rendering an opinion. Firearm examination is a labor-intensive process where analysts use instruments, but the instruments do not provide answers. We also do not typically know the case's outcome and are just there to provide expert testimony in court.

11. How is the work/life balance for an analyst in this section?

- At HFSC, work/life balance is what you make of it, but working outside of normal business hours is not expected by upper management. The culture supports a flexible schedule to allow for a work/life balance.