

# “Techniques You Can Take Home”

Christopher W. Bruce

## *Handout and Resources*

### The Techniques

No	Technique	Summary	References
1	<i>Google-Alert your jurisdiction</i>	Use Google Alerts to get automatic e-mail notifications on developments, crime-related and otherwise, in your jurisdiction.	<a href="http://www.google.com/alerts">http://www.google.com/alerts</a>
2	<i>Schedule a regular ride-along</i>	Ride-alongs help you develop rapport with line officers, meet offenders and victims directly, get a sense of operational tactics, get feedback on your products, and obtain street-level intelligence.	Ronald Clarke and John Eck, <i>Crime Analysis for Problem Solvers in 60 Small Steps</i> (USDOJ, 2006), Step 2: “Be the Local Crime Expert.”  Deborah Osborne and Susan Wernicke, <i>Introduction to Crime Analysis</i> (Haworth, 2003), p. 100.
3	<i>Take a different route home every day</i>	Consider your drive home part of your learning experience. Plot a different route each day to familiarize yourself with different parts of your jurisdiction.	
4	<i>Get permission to follow up on reports</i>	Get permission from your agency to follow-up with certain victims yourself, within acceptable parameters. It gives you direct exposure to victims.	
5	<i>Ask to participate in offender interviews</i>	Make sure you get the answers to your questions by taking a role in interviews, by providing data, preparing questions, observing, or actually participating.	
6	<i>Learn police tactics and strategy</i>	Crime analysts should involve themselves more in the process of developing tactics and strategies based on their work. The first step is knowing what the available tactics and strategies are.	Ronald Clarke and John Eck, <i>Crime Analysis for Problem Solvers in 60 Small Steps</i> (USDOJ, 2006), Step 3: “Know what is effective (and not) in policing.”  Tom Casady, “Foreword” in <i>Exploring Crime Analysis</i> , 2nd ed. (IACA, 2008).
7	<i>Forecast</i>	Don’t try to avoid forecasting: it’s inherent in temporal analysis and, despite what you may have been told, you don’t need a large number of incidents to try it.	IACA workbook on “Tactical Crime Analysis.”
8	<i>Understand how Microsoft works with dates</i>	Understanding the unique way Microsoft stores dates and times makes it easy to perform calculations on them, without having to do a “decimal time” conversion.	Mark Stallo and Christopher Bruce, <i>Better Policing with Microsoft Office</i> (ACT Now, 2005), p. 114-115.
9	<i>Automate mean interval forecasting in Excel</i>	For those of you who perform mean interval forecasting on a regular basis, it’s a fairly easy process to automate in Excel.	Mark Stallo and Christopher Bruce, <i>Better Policing with Microsoft Office</i> (ACT Now, 2005), p. 168-173.
10	<i>Use aoristic distributions instead of midpoint analysis for time ranges</i>	Midpoint analysis misrepresents data, and the only excuse to use it is that it used to be really hard to perform the calculations for the alternative. It isn’t any more.	Steven Gottlieb, Sheldon Arenberg, and Raj Singh, <i>Crime Analysis: From First Report to Final Arrest</i> (Montclair, CA: Alpha Publishing, 1994), 429–434  Mark Stallo and Christopher Bruce, <i>Better Policing with Microsoft Office</i> (ACT Now, 2005), p. 173-176.

11	<i>Consider other options before performing mean interval calculations</i>	Not all series are best described using the mean interval calculations. Before you jump into the mathematics, apply common sense, consider tempos, cyclical patterns, and correlations.	Dan Helms et. al., "Temporal Analysis" in <i>Exploring Crime Analysis</i> (IACA, 2004).
12	<i>Stop comparing year-to-year</i>	Comparisons from one year to the next are relatively meaningless. A better solution is to compare the current (or most recent) year to an average of past activity. Some analysts use a weighted average that counts more recent years more.	
13	<i>Interpret statistics and maps</i>	As analysts, we tend to issue a lot of products full of statistics and maps with little qualitative interpretation. Using text boxes and other tools to add even a little interpretation to your raw data can greatly help your audience.	
14	<i>Use thresholds to triage your crime</i>	Threshold analysis can help identify patterns in large volumes of data. It's particularly helpful for understaffed analysts in large agencies. Although the technique has been around for a long time, only recently have modern data querying methods made it practical on a day-to-day basis.	Christopher Bruce, "The Patrol Route Monitor: a Modern Approach to Threshold Analysis" in the IACA's <i>Forecaster</i> , 2008:02.
15	<i>Make responsible charts</i>	Responsible charts are two-dimensional and start their volume axes at 0.	Darrell Huff, <i>How to Lie with Statistics</i> (Norton, 1954).  Ronald Clarke and John Eck, <i>Crime Analysis for Problem Solvers in 60 Small Steps</i> (USDOJ, 2006), Step 57: "Use Simple Figures."
16	<i>Automate!</i>	Crime analysts spend far too much time transposing data. Most regular "reports" you should be able to automate so they're done with a couple of clicks. Use the full features of Access or Crystal reports, linked data, and OLE technology.	
17	<i>Learn formulas and functions</i>	Functions and formulas found in Access, Excel, and other data analysis and statistical software allow you to rearrange, clean, and ask questions of your data in new ways.	Mark Stallo and Christopher Bruce, <i>Better Policing with Microsoft Office</i> (ACT Now, 2005).
18	<i>Design your own mathematical models</i>	Usually when people say that something can't be quantified, it means they don't know how. Crime analysts should be versed in developing sophisticated mathematical models. Use them to identify escalating domestic violence situations, identify your true "top" offenders, prioritize investigations by solvability, or even manage your daily "to do" list.	
19	<i>Use the ALT key to position objects</i>	Holding down the ALT key in Word and PowerPoint stops objects from snapping to the underlying grid during resizing and positioning, allowing you to create more precise layouts.	
20	<i>Read and re-read The Elements of Style</i>	Crime analysts is half-analysis, half-communication. This means we need to be good presenters—and good writers. This classic text is the best book for writers.	William Strunk and E. B. White, <i>The Elements of Style</i> , any edition.
21	<i>Learn about E-Prime</i>	Want to become a more vigorous, more precise writer? Try your hand at e-prime, an English "variation" that excludes all forms of the verb "to be."	<a href="http://www.nobeliefs.com/eprime.htm">http://www.nobeliefs.com/eprime.htm</a> <a href="http://www.esgs.org/uk/art/epr1.htm">http://www.esgs.org/uk/art/epr1.htm</a>

22	<i>Develop an intranet</i>	Crime analysts have long taken pride in their “bulletins,” but the days of the static bulletin—just like the days of the static newspaper—should be coming to an end. Use an intranet so that your audience always has access to live, current information.	Christopher W. Bruce, “Crime Analysis Publications” in <i>Exploring Crime Analysis</i> , 2nd ed. (IACA, 2008).
23	<i>Use a targeted bulletin for other agencies</i>	Instead of spamming surrounding cities and towns with the same crime bulletin you design for your own officers, send a targeted product that includes only information they might find valuable.	
24	<i>Kill the COMPSTAT report</i>	Too many analysts spend too much time having to create a separate product for the agency’s COMPSTAT meeting. The analyst’s existing products ought to suffice. COMPSTAT should be about problem-solving, not discovery.	
25	<i>Handy phrases for recommendations</i>	If you’re shy about making explicit recommendations for tactics and strategies, try phrases like “Experts who have studied this problem recommend...” to take the edge off.	
26	<i>Maintain your own value-added data</i>	Your RMS probably doesn’t track all the data you need. That doesn’t mean that you have to duplicate it. Modern technology allows you to link to your RMS data and maintain just the additional data you need.	Massachusetts Association of Crime Analysts, “Managing Data for Crime Analysis,” at <a href="http://www.macrimeanalysts.com/articles/managingdata.pdf">http://www.macrimeanalysts.com/articles/managingdata.pdf</a>
27	<i>Summarize police narratives</i>	If you read your agency’s crime reports regularly, you probably mentally distill the officer’s long narrative down to the most essential facts. It would probably take only a few extra minutes to write down these summaries for later reference. Identification and analysis becomes much easier when you only have a brief summary to review on the second pass, plus it greatly assists with administrative analysis reporting.	
28	<i>Categorize offenses by situation type</i>	As part of your value-added data in Point #25, learn to sub-categorize offenses like robbery, assault, and theft. You’ll find a carjacking pattern much more easily if you can search only carjackings rather than all robberies.	Massachusetts Association of Crime Analysts, “Classifying & Categorizing Incidents,” at <a href="http://www.macrimeanalysts.com/articles/classification.pdf">http://www.macrimeanalysts.com/articles/classification.pdf</a>
29	<i>When analyzing a pattern, use a checklist</i>	Keep a long checklist of things to consider when analyzing a pattern, lest you forget to look at the day of week or offender vehicle description. The checklist should have factors unique to specific crimes.	
30	<i>Draw your own high-definition series maps</i>	When you’re querying a year’s worth of crime, you need to stick to your GIS, but mapping six incidents that are part of a series is another matter. There’s no particular reason you should be tied to the conventions of your GIS when displaying series maps. You may not even need it at all. Consider drawing your own maps on top of aerial photography, diagrams, or other high-definition sources.	

31	<i>Consider related offenses</i>	When searching for crimes that match incidents in a current series, don't get tunnel vision based on the incident type. Some incidents in a residential rape series may have been reported as burglaries. Some related thefts from cars are recorded as vandalism (if there was nothing to steal). And "suspicious activity," if your agency uses such a CAD code, may give you insight into many types of crime.	
32	<i>Get a second monitor</i>	Losers—ineffective losers—use one monitor. Two monitors practically doubles your productivity, and you probably have one lying around somewhere so it doesn't have to cost a fortune.	
33	<i>Install Google Desktop</i>	With Google Desktop, searching your entire hard drive for a contact, a bulletin, an offender's name, or a lost file is just a couple of keystrokes away.	<a href="http://www.google.com/desktop">www.google.com/desktop</a>
34	<i>Download SPX Screen Capture</i>	One of the handiest tools you can get for \$20, this software allows you to click and drag boxes (or any other shape) around any object on your screen to capture an image. You can do captions, jagged borders, and lots of other effects.	<a href="http://www.moodysoft.com">www.moodysoft.com</a>
35	<i>Check out CrimeStat</i>	This free spatial statistics application has been around for a number of years and has not seen widespread crime analysis adoption, which is tragic, because it can do some pretty nifty things, like spatial distribution calculations, automatic hot spot identification, journey-to-crime analysis, and density maps with more options than SpatialAnalyst.	<a href="http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/CRIMESTAT">www.icpsr.umich.edu/CRIMESTAT</a>  Smith, Susan C. and Christopher W. Bruce. <i>CrimeStat III User Workbook</i> (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2008).
36	<i>Embrace Administrative Analysis</i>	Stop thinking of it as third-priority. It's what keeps many of us employed, and it's your chance to make people happy.	
37	<i>Use the "Scotty Factor"</i>	When someone asks you for a product, tell them it will take four times as long as it will actually take, then complete it in half that time. You'll develop a reputation as a miracle worker!	<i>Star Trek: the Next Generation</i> , Season Six, Episode 4: "Relics."
38	<i>Get out of the "Chain of Command."</i>	Part of your overall strategy as a crime analyst should be to increase your independence within your agency. It's tough to be effective when you're buried 15 layers deep in bureaucracy. By becoming more effective, we can be more independent. Independence increases influence, and influence feeds back into effectiveness. This makes more sense in the diagram.	
39	<i>Get a presentation remote</i>	You'll never be able to go back to using the keyboard to advance your slides after you've used one.	