

# PASSPORT VALIDATION GUIDE

Your essential introduction to recognising  
identity document fraud



PASSPORT



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In this era of increased compliance, rising cases of fraud and greater penalties for those who get it wrong, carrying out robust checks on identity documents has never been more important. **Passports are the number one document to check.**

No other document carries more weight in establishing a person's identity than a passport. In this document, we highlight the main security features of a passport and outline how to verify them. We also list the most common methods used in their forgery and explain how to spot the clues.

While this guidance may assist staff in the detection of basic forgeries it will not provide the skills necessary to detect all forgeries, particularly those produced using sophisticated techniques. It should be noted that alongside visual checks, the use of document scanners and validation software assists greatly in detecting fake documents and is proving the most cost efficient safeguard available in the fight against identity fraud.

## Training, the essential starting point

Any organisation serious about tackling the issue of identity document fraud must consider the appropriate training of staff by a recognised authority.

While true expertise in this field can require years of experience, even just a basic level of training can be sufficient to flag concerns and recognise the need for further investigation.

## Useful equipment

Both standard handheld magnifying glasses and ultra violet (UV) light sources are easy to obtain and can enhance your ability to detect fraudulent documentation. However, the use of this equipment will only be effective if the users have a sound understanding of the document and its safeguards.

It is also worth considering using a document scanner and software. These cost-effective systems perform many of the checks outlined in this document in a matter of seconds, removing the need for extensive training and years of experience with as little as a half day's training.

## Dealing with impostors

When presented with an identity document, the obvious initial question to address is whether the holder is the same person depicted in the document. It is not uncommon for lookalikes to masquerade as other people using a perfectly legitimate passport.



### PLEASE NOTE:

- ✓ Compare the photograph in the document to the actual candidate. Pay particular attention to the lips, chin, eyes, nose and ears. Bear in mind that the photo may be as much as 10 years out of date but the shape of an ear will not change drastically, as an example. Also, check identifiable features, such as moles, scars or tattoos.
- ✓ Calculate the age of the person based on the date of birth in the document. Is it roughly consistent with the appearance of the person standing in front of you?
- ✓ Compare the signature in the document with one provided elsewhere by the individual.

# The anatomy of a passport

Passports must conform to certain international standards and contain a number of security features designed, within financial constraints, to make their forgery as difficult as possible.

## Non-technical visual checks

### Gold blocking on the passport cover

Gold blocking consists of a real gold leaf stamped into the cover of a passport. Authentic gold blocking will be of fine quality, detail and brightness, though less so in older passports due to wear and tear. Potentially suspicious gold blocking is not conclusive but merits a closer look at the rest of the document.



### The photo

A photograph will have a security seal added at the time of issue to deter its removal. This may be an ink stamp (wet ink seal), or an embossed (dry) seal which can be linear or round. Look for signs of misalignment of the seal between the photo and the page. Where photos have been tampered with, you may also see damage adjacent to or behind the photograph.



## PLEASE CHECK

### Indications of possible tampering include:

- Wrinkled or double laminate on the page
- Air bubbles or dirt beneath the laminate
- Excess glue around or behind the photograph
- Inaccurate, broken or missing laminate pattern
- Page wrinkled behind or around photograph
- Cut marks around the photo

## Printing

Genuine travel documents are manufactured on large scale security printing presses using high quality, solid colour print processes and are deliberately complex to make their falsifying difficult. Counterfeits are often produced using colour copiers or other scanning devices, yielding inferior results.

When compared under a magnifying glass the solid lines of print in a genuine document are quite distinct from the jagged edges around lettering produced by cheaper printing processes. Additionally, ink-jet or laser printers cannot replicate the smooth transition between colours printed in the background of genuine passports.

## Alignment

Pages of official passports are trimmed to a standard size and therefore should align exactly. In a forgery the pages may be misaligned due to the poor trimming or assembly of the document. Check that the pages of the booklet align with the spine and the cover.

## Page numbering

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) recommends that passports contain a number unique to the document on every page. If genuine pages from other documents are substituted into a different passport then the number may be altered to match the new document. Close inspection of these unique numbers may highlight alterations.

## Stitching

Passports which have been dismantled to remove the pages will often contain empty stitch holes where the original thread used to be. In addition the stitch holes of the page which has been inserted may not match those of the document, again leaving vacant holes.



Printed inside front cover, GBR passport



Page alignment, GBR passport



## PLEASE CHECK

- Keep an eye out for spelling mistakes. Many fraudsters have been exposed by careless errors or sheer ignorance.



**2. Watermarks:** A watermark is created during manufacture by variations in the thickness of the paper and can be viewed by holding the document up to light or passing light through the paper. A real watermark should reveal subtle darker and lighter areas and will not react under UV light.

**3. Security fibres:** Security fibres appear in random patterns across the paper. They can be visible to the naked eye, or fluorescent when exposed to ultra-violet light.

## Security printing techniques

The printing methods used in a number of identity documents can also contain security features unique to specialised printing presses.

**Intaglio printing:** Intaglio is a printing process which results in the ink having a raised and rough feel which can be felt by running a finger over the paper. Intaglio printing can be found on the inside cover of some (but not all) passports.

**Latent image:** This technique is applied using an intaglio process. It means the pattern can only be revealed by viewing the page at an oblique angle. The photo below shows both intaglio printing and the latent image on the inside of the front cover of the UK passport.

**Gold blocking:** As mentioned above, gold blocking consists of a real gold leaf stamped hard into the cover of the passport. It is of high quality, fine detail and hard to replicate.

**Laser perforations:** These appear on the biodata page of UK and other passports. There are very fine laser perforations which can be seen by holding the page up to the light.

## Holograms (and Kinegrams®)

Holograms form part of a group called diffractive optically variable imaging devices or DOVIDS. Anyone with a debit or credit card will be familiar with them. They reveal an image or pattern when light is diffracted by the device. Their use in passports is a strong deterrent to all but the most sophisticated fraudster. The absence of a DOVID in a passport is cause for suspicion.



Inner pages, GBR passport



Gold blocking, GBR passport



Laser perforations, GBR passport



Biodata page, holographic laminate, GBR passport



## Lamination

We are all familiar with standard lamination – a sheet of clear plastic which covers and protects a document. Laminates can also incorporate visible and invisible safeguards such as optically variable devices. They are used in the latest British passport to protect the integrity of the holder's digital image.

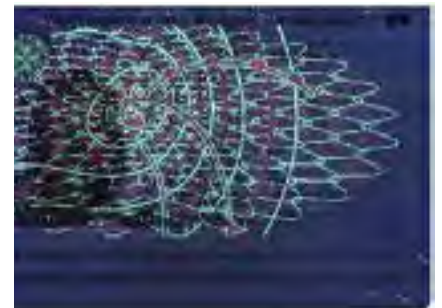
## Ultra-violet light safeguards

Most passports and travel documents contain safeguards which can only be seen under ultra-violet light. Their complete absence is an indication there is something wrong with the document. Many passports include a UV safeguard which covers the holders photograph to protect against photo substitution. Check for the presence, absence or inconsistency of UV safeguards in the laminate both over and adjacent to a photograph. You should check also for unexplained patches of fluorescence behind or around the photograph. It may indicate excess glue or paper damage.

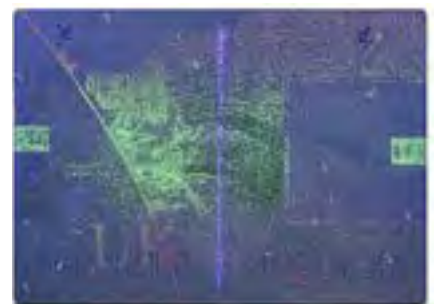
As noted above, genuine watermarks should never react under UV light. Bear in mind also that some UV features may be less apparent in older but nonetheless genuine documents.



Inside front cover, GBR passport



Biodata page, GBR passport



Inner pages, GBR passport



## Where to get help

If you have concerns about the validity of the passport presented to you should contact the National Crime Agency (NCA) on 0370 496 7622 or by visiting [www.actionfraud.police.uk/report\\_fraud](http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud)

In order to improve your internal processes, it may be helpful to design a checklist based on the information provided in this guide.

The vast majority of fraudulent identity documents can quickly and easily be picked up by scanners and software such as the TrustID document validation range.

For further information on identity verification services which authenticate features which you can't check manually, please visit: <https://www.trustid.co.uk>

TrustID

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