

Even considering the eight main fingerprint patterns, it would be impossible to declare two fingerprints to be from the same finger if you were relying purely on matching patterns. So, when matching two fingerprints, it is not the patterns that are important but the characteristics, the little variations that occur in the ridge patterns. For two fingerprints to have been made by the same finger, they must have exactly the same characteristics in exactly the same place.

The diagrams below show eight examples of such characteristics.

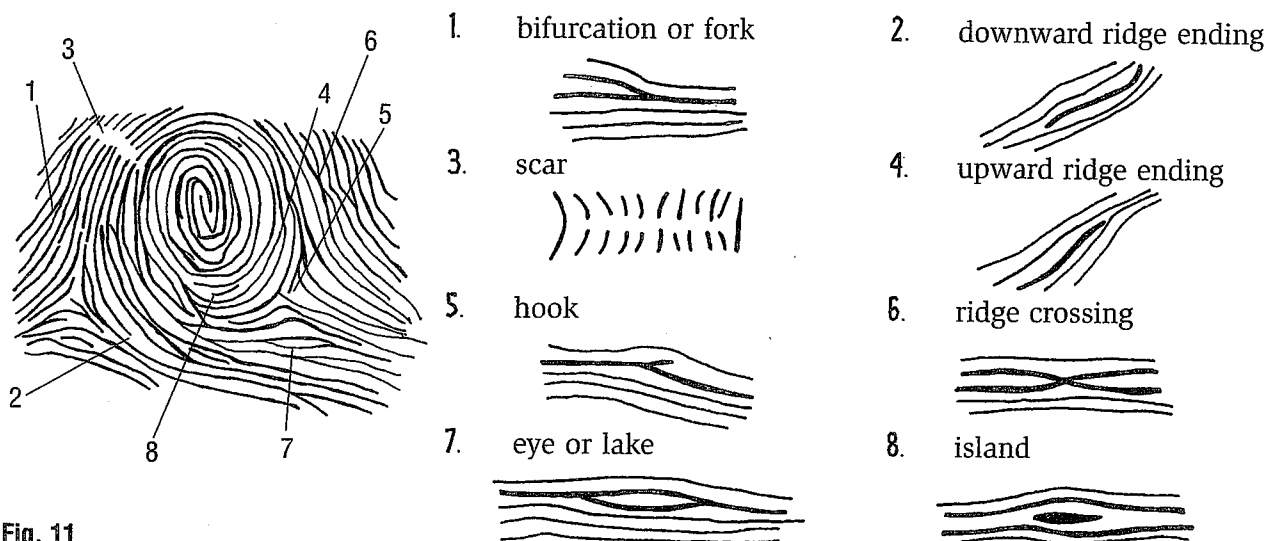


Fig. 11

In some countries there must be a certain number of characteristic points in common if two fingerprints are to be accepted as a match. However, in most parts of Australia there is no minimum number of points of identity required. Instead, a conviction depends on all the available evidence. If a recognised fingerprint specialist declares that, in their opinion, two prints are a match, then legally they are accepted as a match. Of course, the greater the number of matching characteristics, the stronger is the print as evidence. Clearly, there needs to be only one single, unexplained difference between two prints for them to be declared not a match.

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Questions

1. Explain what a characteristic point is, and how a fingerprint expert would use one to try to match a fingerprint found at a crime scene with one on file.
2. Below are two fingerprints that look the same. Try to find at least ten possible characteristics in common and label them.
3. Would you say that the two fingerprints are an exact match? If so, explain why you have come to this conclusion.
4. Explain why one fingerprint is a square shape and the other more rounded.

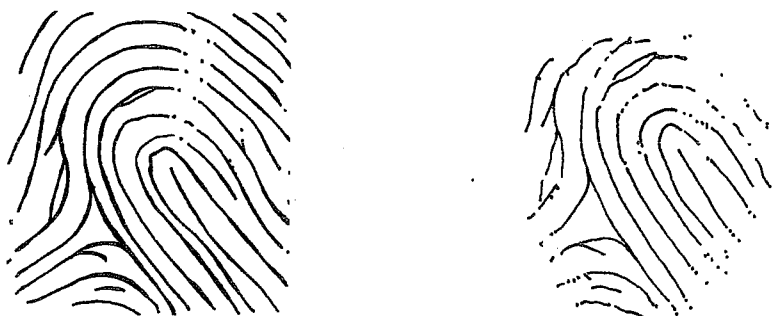


Fig. 12