Proving Who Created Or Edited A Document

Attributing authorship or edits to a document requires a forensic approach, combining internal metadata, platform evidence, end point records, and content analysis. This guide details how to build a robust case, address in g common pitfalls and technical limitations for UK litigators, in-house counsel, and investigators.

e-discovery.uk, Computer Forensics Lab. Published 2026-08-31.
https://e-discovery.uk/library/proving-who-created-or-edited-a-document

AUTHORSHIPATTRIBUTION · A GUIDE FOR UK LAWYERS Proving Who Created or Edited a Document Authorship From Metadata, Version Ladders, Platform Logs and Endpoints COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB

§ ABOUT THE AUTHOR PREPARED BY COMPUTER FORENSICS LAB E-DISCOVERY TEAM 19 where authorship is the issue.

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§ 01 · ORIENTATION Executive summary THE HEADLINE POINT: AUTHORSHIPISPROVEDBYJOININGFOURSTRATA: WHATTHE DOCUMENTSAYSABOUTITSELF, WHATTHEPLATFORMRECORDED, WHAT THE END POINT REMEMBERS, ANDWHATTHEWRITINGREVEALS: EACHFALLIBLEALONE, EACH CORROBORATINGTHEOTHERS, WITHTHETRAPSNAMEDBEFORETHEFINDINGISMADE

§ 02 · FIRST PRINCIPLES The problem in plain English: documents remember their authors, imperfectly

§ 03 · INTERNALMETADATA Internal metadata: author fields, revision data and what they actually record

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§ 05 · ENDPOINTANDTRANSMISSIONEVIDENCE Endpoint and transmission evidence: where the document was open, and who sent it

§ 06 · CONTENTEVIDENCE Content evidence: linguistic, structural and stylistic attribution

§ 07 · THELATTICEANDTHETRAPS The lattice and the traps: joining sources and address in g alternatives

§ 08 · THEWIDERMAP Source architecture: where else the evidence lives QUESTION LADDER + INTERNAL END POINT TRANSMISSION CONTENT / COUNTERPART METADATA ARTEFACTS RECORDS ST YLE COPIES PLATFORM AUDIT LOG

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§ HOW A SPECIALIST LABORATORY CAN ASSIST Working with Computer Forensics Lab Speak to a forensic examiner, not a salesperson. INSTRUCTTHELAB NEWENQUIRIESEMAILE - DISCOVERY

Questions and answers

The document's author field names my client. Doesn't that settle it?

No: the field records the application's registered user on the machine where the document (or its template, or the document it was copied from) was created, and it is editable (§3): Example 1's field named a template; Example 3's date was reset by a copy. It is evidence of environment, corroborated by the platform ladder and the end point before it becomes evidence of a person.

Can we prove who inserted a specific clause?

Frequently: the version ladder's diffs localise the change to a rung, the rung names the saving account and time, and the end point and transmission records corroborate the session (§4-§5): Example 1's 19:52 check-in. Co- author in g adds caveats about session granularity, and the account-to-person step needs its own corroboration, stated as such.

What about an anonymous document with all metadata stripped?

The stripping is rarely complete: PDF XMP data often preserves source fields, end point s hold a u to recovery drafts and recent-file entries, the template and application build narrow the population, and stylistic comparison adds weight (§3, §5-§6): Example 2's letter was attributed through all four. The counterpart's copy may also carry what the author cleaned from theirs (§8).

Several people edited the document together. Who is the author?

Each contributor of each change, at the granularity the platform retained: per-save attribution always, per- paragraph where the application kept it (§4): the report attributes the material changes to accounts and sessions and states where the granularity runs out. "Author" becomes a schedule, not a name: which is usually the truthful answer for collaborative documents.

Is linguistic analysis admissible and reliable?

Forensic linguistics is an established discipline with its own methodology and limits, instructed as a separate specialism (guide 100 §3) and weighed by courts on its stated method and the material available (§6): it corroborates the technical strata far more often than it stands alone, and short questioned texts limit it. The report should say which role it plays.

The document was drafted with an AI tool. Who is the author?

The question shifts to who prompted, who edited and who adopted the output: the prompting account and session, the platform ladder of subsequent edits, and the person who circulated it as their own (§6, guide 126): the technical strata still attribute the human acts around the generated text, and the legal question of responsibility follows those acts. cflab. u k · e-disc ove r y. u k ©2026 Computer Forensics Lab Ltd ·cflab.uk ·e-discovery.uk ·info@cflab.uk ·+44 (0)20 7164 6915

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