

Cause and Manner of Death Tips

1. You need **medical history + a physical exam**

Medical history can come from:

- Family,
- Doctors,
- law enforcement, and/or
- medical records.

2. **Red flags** to pay attention to:

- any history of trauma (no matter how remote),
- epidural/subdural/subarachnoid hemorrhage,
- fractures,
- thermal/chemical burns,
- hypo-/hyper-thermia, and/or
- a positive toxicology screen.

3. Make sure that the listed cause and manner of death **tell the story** of how/why the death occurred. Think about why the death certificate is so important and what it is used for.

4. Avoid **mechanisms of death** and list instead the **CAUSE** of death!

Ex: Cardiopulmonary arrest and multiple organ failure are common mechanisms of death that can be caused by many conditions: hypertension, drug overdose, etc.

5. **Cardiopulmonary Arrest** really just means death. It isn't a cause of death!

6. The **contributing causes** section of the death certificate is not just a place to list medical conditions. Some common contributing causes for many causes of death are:

- Diabetes,
- Chronic alcohol use,
- Obesity, or
- An immune disorder.

7. Common things to look for to determine if a case is a **suicide** (as manner of death):

- Note or letter,
- Prior attempts.

***Remember, if there are competing equally likely explanations, "undetermined" may be used.*

8. **Proofread!** Medical terms can be tricky, so check the spelling of medical terms to ensure that reporting is correct.

