

Featuring  
a chapter  
for each  
cliché!



## 20 CLICHÉS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE FBI

Reality Checklist ✓

**FBI**  
Case File Review  
with Jerri Williams

**#1 FBI PROFILERS HUNT SERIAL KILLERS:** The primary goal of profilers and criminal investigative analysis is to examine the behavioral information submitted to the Behavioral Analysis Unit and provide advice to the requesting field office or law enforcement agency on difficult to solve cases.

**#2 THE FBI DOESN'T PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS:** The FBI respects and values the contributions other agencies bring to the table and strives to maintain collaborative relationships with all law enforcement partners. FBI field offices support multiple task forces where local, state, and federal investigators work side by side, sharing manpower, resources and intelligence.

**#3 MOST FBI AGENTS ARE WHITE MALES, AND FEMALE AGENTS ARE SINGLE:** Recent TV shows and movies portray the FBI as a highly diverse organization. However, the majority of special agents are white males. The agent workforce also includes women (23%), minorities (22%) and individuals of different religions and sexual orientations. Contrary to how they're portrayed in film and fiction, majority of veteran female agents, like their male counterparts, are married with children.

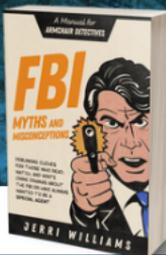
**#4 THE FBI ONLY HIRES ACCOUNTANTS, ATTORNEYS, POLICE AND MILITARY OFFICERS:**

Candidates come from a variety of backgrounds, such as sales managers, linguists, cyber/computer specialists, pilots, teachers, nurses, scientists, and engineers. Some were even dentists and medical doctors, before joining the FBI. There are even a few former professional athletes.

**#5 ONE AGENT CAN WORK A MAJOR INVESTIGATION ALONE:** Often, writers don't have the time to develop multiple characters, so they create a single composite character to incorporate the work of several agents. However, big cases require the contributions of many agents and support staff in order for the operation to be successful. The typical investigation, however, is assigned to one case agent who assumes an almost entrepreneurial ownership of her cases, deciding what needs to be done and what tools need to be used to gather evidence to solve the case.

**#6 AGENTS ARE UNEMOTIONAL AND HAVE NO SENSE OF HUMOR:** FBI agents feel and demonstrate compassion, empathy, and respect for victims, witnesses and subjects. However, they take their job seriously, but not necessarily themselves. Agents are assigned to squads based on related violations and each is like a large dysfunctional family. Practical jokes are often played.

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**#7 UNDERCOVER AGENTS (UCA) RUN CASES:** UCAs play important roles in FBI cases, but the case agent is responsible for the administration of the case. It might help to look at the case agent as the casting agent, producer, and director of the investigation while the UCA is the lead actor.

**#8 THERE IS ONE CENTRAL DATABASE:** It's impossible to gather everything ever known about a person with a couple of keystrokes. There is an endless number of databases that must be searched to get a complete profile of an individual. It could reasonably take an analyst days, if not weeks, to gather a comprehensive file on a subject.

**#9 AGENTS USE INTIMIDATION AND THREATS DURING AN INTERROGATION:** The appropriate FBI term is an interview, and subjects don't cooperate if they think they're being disrespected. Agents are always looking to collect and develop human intelligence. If they're empathetic to the subject they interview today, he may become their informant or cooperating witness tomorrow.

**#10 FBI SENIOR EXECUTIVES ARE OUT IN THE FIELD:** Although crime dramas often portray upper level management actively working cases, the Director of the FBI and the Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of a field office seldom go out to crime scenes, searches and arrests. Agents often joke with each other, "when senior management arrives; an agent has lost all control of his case."

**#11 FBI AGENTS WORK FOR FEDERAL PROSECUTORS:** In some local municipalities, detectives are assigned to the District Attorney's Office and work under the direction of an Assistant DA. In the federal system, the FBI investigates and the United States Attorney's Office prosecutes. However, they consult often on the merits of a case and the status of the investigation.

**#12 THE CIA HUNTS SPIES IN THE UNITED STATES:** The FBI is the lead agency on intelligence matters in the United States, especially those directed against its citizens. The CIA's mission is to gather and analyze foreign intelligence and, unlike the FBI, the CIA has no law enforcement authority. However, the CIA and the FBI work together as needed to protect national security interests.

**#13 THE FBI CAN WIRETAP ANYBODY, ANYTIME:** A federal judge must approve all requests for interceptions of wire, oral, or electronic communications. Before authorization is considered, a detailed application must be submitted establishing the facts of the investigation, probable cause, and that the wiretap may provide additional evidence of a felony violation of federal law.

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**#14 IT'S COMMON FOR FBI AGENTS TO BE IN GUN BATTLES:** Shootouts with bad guys are frequently featured in FBI crime dramas. Although firefights occur, most agents have never fired their weapons while on the job. The FBI honors special agents killed in the line of duty as the result of a direct adversarial confrontation. Agents accept the incumbent risks of protecting the public.

**#15 FBI AGENTS FLY AROUND THE WORLD CONDUCTING INVESTIGATIONS:** An agent traveling outside the U.S. must obtain host country clearance before going overseas. International investigations are conducted at the invitation of and in concert with a foreign country's law enforcement and security personnel. In the U.S., a "lead" is often set requesting a "lead agent" in another field office to interview witnesses and obtain documents on behalf of the case agent.

**#16 FBI AGENTS INVESTIGATE MURDERS:** If the FBI is investigating a homicide, a federal violation was also in play when the victim was murdered, such as the person's civil rights were violated, the crime occurred on federal property, a federal fugitive warrant was issued, or a kidnapping victim was taken across state lines. In most cases, the murder suspect, once apprehended, is tried in state court.

**#17 A FORENSIC EXAMINER DOES IT ALL, COLLECTS EVIDENCE AND INVESTIGATES:** Unlike on TV, each forensic examiner at the FBI Laboratory has a specialty, whether it be DNA, hair and fibers, fingerprints, ballistics, or blood spatter analysis. In the field, highly trained FBI personnel assigned to an Evidence Response Team (ERT) collect forensic evidence from crime scenes and searches.

**#18 BEING AN FBI BOMB TECH IS A DANGEROUS JOB:** Hand entry, where a bomb tech places his hands directly on an unexploded improvised explosive device (IED) or wires protruding from a suspicious package, is rarely done. Remote equipment is used to examine and render safe possible explosive devices. Bomb techs process and provide testimony about post-blast crime scenes.

**#19 BAD GUYS PLOT REVENGE AGAINST THE FBI AGENTS WHO PUT THEM BEHIND BARS:** Agents and their families receive immediate transfers to safety if a credible threat is made against them or their loved ones. However, threats are rare. Based on the respect shown to them during investigations, many subjects maintain cordial contact with case agents during and after serving time in prison.

**#20 FBI AGENTS ARE PERFECT AND NEVER GET IN TROUBLE:** Unfortunately, some agents have made serious transgressions from the FBI's core values. Notwithstanding the misconduct of a few bad apples, there is a saying in the FBI, "Don't embarrass the Bureau," and the belief that agents must strive to uphold the proud reputation of the FBI established during nearly 120 years of service.