



California Private Investigator Licence (BSIS)

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1. Which California agency licenses and regulates private investigators?

- A. The Department of Justice (DOJ)
- B. The local county sheriff
- C. The Bureau of Security and Investigative Services (BSIS)
- D. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

2. What is skip tracing in a private investigation?

- A. Erasing a subject's debt
- B. The process of locating a person who cannot be readily found
- C. Hacking a phone
- D. Following someone on foot

3. California is a 'two-party consent' state, which means recording a confidential conversation generally requires:

- A. No consent at all
- B. The consent of all parties to the conversation
- C. Consent of only the investigator
- D. A court order in every case

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4. Chain of custody refers to:

- A. The order witnesses testify
- B. The documented chronological record of who handled an item of evidence
- C. A type of handcuff
- D. The client billing sequence



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5. The primary goal of surveillance in most investigations is to:

- A. Confront the subject
- B. Observe and document the subject's activities without being detected
- C. Arrest the subject
- D. Interview the subject

6. A professional investigative report should be written:

- A. With emotional language
- B. Factually, objectively, and in clear chronological order
- C. To favor the client regardless of facts
- D. Only in legal jargon

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7. An investigator's duty of confidentiality means they should:

- A. Discuss cases at parties
- B. Not disclose client information except as authorized or legally required
- C. Post case details online
- D. Tell the subject everything

8. To carry a firearm while working as a private investigator in California, a PI must:

- A. Just carry it; the PI license is enough
- B. Obtain a separate BSIS firearms permit and meet its requirements
- C. Be a retired officer
- D. Ask the client for permission

9. Sam is not a licensed private investigator; however, advertises private investigation services in an online phone directory. What type of action can BSIS undertake?

- A. Issue a citation with an administrative penalty up to \$5,000 and an order to cease and desist
- B. BSIS does not have authority over internet advertising; therefore BSIS can do nothing but ask Sam to remove his listing
- C. Notify the local District Attorney's Office for prosecution
- D. Issue a citation with an administrative penalty up to \$7,500

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10. Under the Private Investigator Act, the PI license number is commonly referenced by which Business and Professions Code section?

- A. Section 7512
- B. Section 7542
- C. Section 837
- D. Section 832

11. Which is the BEST first step when opening a new investigation?

- A. Begin surveillance immediately
- B. Confront the subject
- C. Define the client's objective and scope in writing
- D. Pull the subject's credit report

12. Photographing a person who is in a public place where they have no reasonable expectation of privacy is generally:

- A. Always illegal
- B. Illegal without a warrant
- C. Permissible
- D. A felony

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13. A break in the chain of custody can cause evidence to be:

- A. Excluded or given less weight in court
- B. Automatically accepted
- C. Worth more
- D. Returned to the subject immediately

14. A stationary (fixed) surveillance is best described as:

- A. Watching a location from a set vantage point
- B. Following a subject on foot through a mall
- C. Tracking a phone remotely
- D. Interviewing neighbors



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15. In a report, the investigator should clearly distinguish between:

- A. Facts observed and opinions or conclusions
- B. Long words and short words
- C. The client and the subject's names only
- D. Morning and afternoon

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16. A conflict of interest arises when an investigator:

- A. Has competing loyalties that could compromise the case
- B. Works long hours
- C. Charges a flat fee
- D. Uses a camera

17. A private investigator's authority to use force is essentially the same as that of:

- A. A private citizen, acting in lawful self-defense or defense of others
- B. A police officer
- C. A judge
- D. A soldier

18. Which of the following is true regarding the denial of employment based wholly or partly because of information contained in a consumer credit report?

- A. The user of the report must advise the applicant that an adverse action has been taken and supply the name and address of the consumer credit reporting agency making the report
- B. The applicant may file a lawsuit under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- C. The user of the report must report the findings to the Department of Labor, then the Federal Trade Commission
- D. The user of the report does not have to do anything

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19. What is the minimum age to qualify for a California private investigator license?

- A. 16 years old
- B. 21 years old
- C. 25 years old
- D. 18 years old



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20. OSINT refers to:

- A. Open-source intelligence gathered from publicly available information
- B. A type of GPS tracker
- C. An interrogation method
- D. A court order

21. California Penal Code 647(j) prohibits using a device to view or record a person:

- A. In an area where they have a reasonable expectation of privacy, such as a bathroom or bedroom
- B. Walking on a public sidewalk
- C. Driving on a freeway
- D. Standing in a store doorway

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22. When photographing a scene for documentation, the investigator should:

- A. Edit photos to look better
- B. Take only one photo
- C. Record the date, time, and avoid altering the image
- D. Delete photos that do not help the client

23. If a subject appears to notice the investigator during mobile surveillance, the best action is usually to:

- A. Speed up and stay close
- B. Confront the subject
- C. Break off and re-establish later or hand off to another investigator
- D. Honk to distract them

24. The 'who, what, when, where, why, and how' framework helps ensure a report is:

- A. Shorter
- B. More entertaining
- C. Complete and answers the essential questions
- D. Written in passive voice

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25. Accepting a case to investigate both a husband and the wife who is suing him would be:

- A. Good for business
- B. Required
- C. A clear conflict of interest
- D. Recommended by BSIS

26. The level of force a private citizen may lawfully use must be:

- A. Always lethal
- B. Whatever feels necessary
- C. Reasonable and proportionate to the threat
- D. Unlimited if provoked

27. If you have any outstanding tax obligations due to the Franchise Tax Board (FTB) or the State Board of Equalization (BOE) and appear on either the FTB or BOE's certified lists of top 500 tax delinquencies over \$100,000, BSIS is required to _____.

- A. Suspend the license/certificate/registration of any applicant or licensee
- B. Deny the application for an applicant for a period not to exceed 30 days or suspend the license for a period not to exceed 60 days
- C. Administer a fine of no less than \$10,000, but no more than \$5,000 and require the outstanding tax obligations be met
- D. Administer a fine of no less than \$2,500, but no more than \$5,000 and require the outstanding tax obligations be met within 90 days of notice

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28. How many hours of qualifying, compensated investigative experience does BSIS generally require for a PI license?

- A. 500 hours
- B. 1,000 hours
- C. 6,000 hours
- D. 10,000 hours

29. When interviewing a cooperative witness, an investigator should generally:

- A. Lead the witness to the desired answer
- B. Record secretly without consent in all cases
- C. Threaten the witness for the truth
- D. Ask open-ended questions and let the witness describe events in their own words



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30. An investigator who enters a fenced backyard without permission to take photos may be liable for:

- A. Nothing; PIs are exempt
- B. A parking violation
- C. Practicing law
- D. Trespass and invasion of privacy



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Answer Key & Explanations

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1. C — The Bureau of Security and Investigative Services (BSIS)

Private investigators in California are licensed by the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services (BSIS), a division of the Department of Consumer Affairs.

2. B — The process of locating a person who cannot be readily found

Skip tracing is the systematic process of locating a person (a 'skip') who has moved, is avoiding contact, or is otherwise hard to find, using public records, databases, and lawful research.

3. B — The consent of all parties to the conversation

Under Penal Code 632, California requires the consent of all parties to record a confidential communication; recording without it can be a crime and creates civil liability.

4. B — The documented chronological record of who handled an item of evidence

Chain of custody is the documented, unbroken record of every person who collected, handled, transferred, or stored an item of evidence, used to prove it was not altered.

5. B — Observe and document the subject's activities without being detected

Surveillance is about discreet observation and documentation; being detected usually compromises the case and may alter the subject's behavior.

6. B — Factually, objectively, and in clear chronological order

Reports must present facts objectively and chronologically. Opinion, bias, or advocacy undermines credibility and can create legal exposure.

7. B — Not disclose client information except as authorized or legally required

Confidentiality is fundamental: client information may be disclosed only with authorization or when legally compelled, such as by a valid court order.

8. B — Obtain a separate BSIS firearms permit and meet its requirements

A PI license alone does not authorize carrying a firearm on duty. The investigator must obtain a separate BSIS firearms permit and complete the required training.

9. A — Issue a citation with an administrative penalty up to \$5,000 and an order to cease and desist

Under California B&P Code §7523, BSIS has authority to issue citations with administrative penalties up to \$5,000 and orders to cease and desist for unlicensed persons advertising PI services.

10. B — Section 7542

The California Private Investigator Act is found at Business and Professions Code section 7512 and following; PI 7542 specifically addresses the license. The Act governs qualifications, conduct, and discipline.

11. C — Define the client's objective and scope in writing

Clarifying and documenting the client's objective, scope, and legal limits first prevents wasted effort, scope creep, and unlawful actions later in the case.



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12. C — Permissible

There is generally no reasonable expectation of privacy in public; lawful observation and photography of people in public view is usually permissible, subject to anti-harassment and stalking laws.

13. A — Excluded or given less weight in court

If the chain of custody is broken, the opposing party can argue the evidence was tampered with or mistaken, leading a court to exclude it or reduce its weight.

14. A — Watching a location from a set vantage point

Stationary surveillance involves observing a fixed location (such as a residence or workplace) from a concealed vantage point to record comings and goings.

15. A — Facts observed and opinions or conclusions

Separating observed facts from interpretation lets the reader evaluate the evidence and prevents conclusions from being mistaken for established fact.

16. A — Has competing loyalties that could compromise the case

A conflict of interest exists when the investigator has divided loyalties (for example, investigating both sides of a dispute) that could undermine objectivity and trust.

17. A — A private citizen, acting in lawful self-defense or defense of others

A PI has no special use-of-force authority; force may be used only as a private citizen could, primarily in lawful self-defense or defense of others.

18. A — The user of the report must advise the applicant that an adverse action has been taken and supply the name and address of the consumer credit reporting agency making the report

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), when an adverse action is taken based on a consumer credit report, the user must notify the applicant and provide the name and address of the consumer reporting agency.

19. D — 18 years old

An applicant must be at least 18 years of age to be licensed as a private investigator in California.

20. A — Open-source intelligence gathered from publicly available information

OSINT (open-source intelligence) is information lawfully collected from publicly available sources such as websites, social media, public records, and news.

21. A — In an area where they have a reasonable expectation of privacy, such as a bathroom or bedroom

Penal Code 647(j) (invasion of privacy / 'peeping') criminalizes secretly viewing or recording someone in a place where they have a reasonable expectation of privacy.

22. C — Record the date, time, and avoid altering the image

Documentary photos should be unaltered and accompanied by metadata such as date and time so they accurately and credibly represent the scene.

23. C — Break off and re-establish later or hand off to another investigator

If 'burned,' continuing risks confrontation and ruins the surveillance. Breaking off and resuming later, or rotating to another operative, protects the case.



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24. C — Complete and answers the essential questions

Covering the who, what, when, where, why, and how ensures the report is thorough and addresses the essential facts a reader needs.

25. C — A clear conflict of interest

Representing or investigating opposing parties in the same matter is a clear conflict of interest and is unethical without informed consent and proper safeguards (often impossible).

26. C — Reasonable and proportionate to the threat

Lawful self-defense allows only force that is reasonable and proportionate to the threat faced; excessive force can be criminal and create civil liability.

27. A — Suspend the license/certificate/registration of any applicant or licensee

Under California B&P Code §494.5, BSIS is required to suspend the license, certificate, or registration of any applicant or licensee who appears on the FTB or BOE's certified list of top 500 tax delinquencies over \$100,000.

28. C — 6,000 hours

BSIS generally requires three years (6,000 hours) of compensated investigative experience, which may be partially offset by a relevant degree.

29. D — Ask open-ended questions and let the witness describe events in their own words

Open-ended, non-leading questions produce more reliable, less contaminated information. Leading or coercive techniques taint statements and can render them useless or illegal.

30. D — Trespass and invasion of privacy

Entering private, enclosed property without consent is trespass and may also constitute invasion of privacy; a PI license grants no right to trespass.



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