



Practical Cyber Forensics

An Incident-Based Approach to
Forensic Investigations

—

Niranjan Reddy

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Pune, Maharashtra, India

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I solely dedicate this book to my beloved parents who have been my role models and supported me all throughout my journey - and well as my one and only charming daughter Anjor Reddy.

Table of Contents

About the Author	xix
About the Technical Reviewer	xxi
Acknowledgments	xxiii
Introduction	xxv
Chapter 1: Introduction to Cyber Forensics.....	1
What Is Cyber Forensics?.....	2
A Brief About Cyber Forensics.....	3
Forensics Investigation Process	4
Incident.....	5
Identification.....	5
Seizure.....	5
Imaging.....	5
Hashing	6
Analysis	6
Reporting.....	6
Preservation	6
Forensic Protocol for Evidence Acquisition.....	7
Digital Forensics Standards and Guidelines.....	8
Digital Evidence	8
Write Blockers	9
What Is a Forensic Triage?.....	10
Chain of Custody.....	10
What Is a Cybercrime?.....	11

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Types of Cybercrimes..... 12
 - Malware Attacks (Ransomware, Rootkit, Virus, Trojan)..... 12
 - Malvertising..... 13
 - Phishing Attacks..... 13
 - Misuse of Personal Information (Identity Theft) and Cyberstalking..... 13
 - Creating Fake Profiles 14
 - Web Defacement 14
 - Web Jacking 14
 - Juice Jacking 14
 - Distributed Denial of Service Attacks (DDoS) 15
 - Software Piracy 15
 - Formjacking..... 15
- Notable Data Breaches of 2018 16
 - Aadhaar 16
 - Facebook..... 16
 - Quora 16
 - Marriott Hotels..... 16
 - TicketFly 17
 - MyHeritage 17
 - Exactis 17
 - British Airways..... 17
 - Cathay Pacific..... 17
 - Under Armour 17
- Top 10 Cybersecurity Trends for 2019..... 18
- Case Study 1: Sim Swapping Fraud 19
- Case Study 2: SIM Swapping Fraud 20
- Case Study 3: ATM Card Cloning 20
- Case Study 4: Man Duped of 36,000 Euros 21
- Case Study 5: Google Nest Guard..... 22

Challenges in Cyber Forensics	22
Encryption	22
Cloud Forensics	22
Data Volume	23
Legal	23
Rapid Increase and Growth in Number of Technological Smart Devices.....	23
Lack of Training and Shortage of Resources	23
Cross-Border Challenges.....	24
Growth in Digital Crimes.....	24
Solid State Drive (SSD) Forensics.....	24
Skills Required to Become a Cyber Forensic Expert	25
Proficiency of a Cyber Forensic Expert	25
Cyber Forensic Tools	26
Summary.....	27
References	28
Chapter 2: Windows Forensics	29
Digital Evidence in Windows	29
Volatile Evidence Artifacts	30
Non-volatile Artifacts	31
File System	39
FAT32	41
NTFS	41
Case Study: NTFS Timestamp Analysis.....	42
Timeline Analysis	49
Challenges	50
Case Study: Autopsy Tool	50
Case Study: Recuva Tool	62
Summary.....	67
References.....	68

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Chapter 3: Linux Forensics 69**
- Popular Linux Distributions 70
 - Red Hat Linux 70
 - Ubuntu 70
 - Fedora 70
 - Debian 70
 - SUSE 71
 - Mint 71
 - Arch Linux 71
 - Linux Lite 71
- File System 71
- Forensic Process for Linux Systems 73
- Forensic Artifacts 73
- Special Artifacts 74
- Linux Distributions Used for Forensic Analysis 75
 - Kali 75
 - DEFT 76
 - Parrot 79
 - Santoku Linux 79
 - Blackbuntu 79
 - Paladin Linux 80
 - CAINE 80
- Challenges 80
- Differences Between Windows and Linux from a Forensics Perspective 81
- Case Study: Listing Partitions 82
- Case Study: Memory Acquisition of Linux System 85
- Case Study: SysScout Tool 88
- Case Study: Raw Image Analysis 94
- Summary 99
- References 100

Chapter 4: Mac OS Forensics	101
Mac OS X vs OS X vs macOS.....	101
Mac OS X.....	101
OS X.....	102
macOS.....	102
File System.....	102
Forensic Process for macOS.....	103
Forensic Artifacts.....	104
System Artifacts.....	104
User Profiles.....	105
Keychain.....	105
Logs.....	106
Challenges.....	106
Information to Collect During MacBook Forensics Investigation.....	107
MacQuisition.....	108
Guymager.....	109
Case Study: Acquisition of a MacBook Machine.....	109
Blacklight.....	115
Case Study: Plist Viewer.....	116
Case Study: OSXCollector.....	122
Case Study: Memory Acquisition.....	127
Case Study: Exe Malware.....	131
Summary.....	131
References.....	132
Chapter 5: Anti-forensics	133
Anti-forensic Practices.....	134
Data Wiping and Shredding.....	134
Data Remanence.....	135
Degaussing.....	135
Case Study: USB Oblivion.....	136
Case Study: Eraser.....	142

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Trail Obfuscation 145
 - Spoofing 145
 - Data Modification 146
 - Case Study: Timestamp 146
- Encryption 149
 - Case Study: VeraCrypt 149
- Data Hiding 158
 - Steganography and Cryptography 158
 - Case Study: SilentEye 159
- Anti-forensics Detection Techniques..... 164
 - Case Study: Stegdetect 165
- Summary..... 167
- References 168
- Chapter 6: Network Forensics 169**
 - The OSI Model 170
 - Layer 1: Physical Layer 171
 - Layer 2: Data Link Layer 171
 - Layer 3: Network Layer..... 171
 - Layer 4: Transport Layer 172
 - Layer 5: Session Layer..... 174
 - Layer 6: Presentation Layer 174
 - Layer 7: Application Layer 174
 - Forensic Footprints 175
 - Seizure of Networking Devices 175
 - Network Forensic Artifacts..... 176
 - ICMP Attacks 178
 - ICMP Sweep Attack 178
 - Traceroute Attack 178
 - Inverse Mapping Attack..... 179
 - ICMP Smurf Attack..... 179

Drive-By Downloads.....	179
Network Forensic Analysis Tools.....	180
Wireshark	180
Case Study: Wireshark.....	180
Network Miner	187
Case Study: Network Miner	188
Xplico.....	195
Case Study: Xplico.....	196
Summary.....	203
References.....	204
Chapter 7: Mobile Forensics	205
Acquisition Protocol	205
Case Study: Unlocking with Face ID or Touch ID	206
Android Operating System	206
Rooting an Android Device	207
Android Debug Bridge	208
Methods for Screen Lock Bypass	209
Manual Extraction	210
Physical Acquisition	215
Tools for Image Extraction	216
Case Study: Image Extraction of an Android Device.....	216
JTAG	223
Chip-Off.....	224
Micro-read	225
Challenges in Mobile Forensics	226
iOS Operating System	227
iOS Device Boot Process	227
Jailbreak vs. No Jailbreak	228
iOS File System and Architecture	229
iTunes iPhone Backup	229

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Case Study: iPhone Backup Extractor..... 229
- Case Study: Dr. Fone iPhone Backup Viewer 234
- Summary..... 238
- References..... 239
- Chapter 8: Cloud Forensics..... 241**
- Cloud Computing Models 242
- Defining Cloud Forensics 243
- Server-Side Forensics..... 244
- Client-Side Forensics..... 246
- Challenges in Cloud Forensics 246
- Artifacts in Cloud Forensics 247
- Log Files of Browsers 247
- Physical Memory 247
- Registry 247
- For Mobile Devices 248
- Use of Cloud Forensics 248
- Forensics as a Service (FaaS)..... 248
- Case Study: Google Drive Investigation..... 249
- Case Study: Dropbox Investigation..... 258
- WhatsApp Forensics 263
- Case Study: WhatsApp Database Extraction 264
- Summary..... 273
- References..... 275
- Chapter 9: Malware Forensics..... 277**
- Types of Malware..... 277
- Viruses..... 277
- Worms 278
- Trojan..... 278
- Rootkits 279
- Spyware..... 279

Adware	279
Exploits	279
Ransomware.....	280
Bot	280
Malware Analysis	280
Static Analysis	280
Dynamic Analysis	282
Tools for Analysis	283
Challenges	284
Malware as a Service.....	285
Case Study: Android Malware Analysis	285
Custom Malware Sample	285
Tool 1: QUIXXI.....	286
Tool 2: QARK	292
Tool 3: MOBsf.....	294
Case Study: Windows Malware Analysis of Data Stealing Malware.....	298
Static Analysis	299
Dynamic Analysis	309
Case Study: Ransomware	313
Summary.....	314
References.....	315
Chapter 10: Web Attack Forensics	317
OWASP Top 10	317
Web Attack Tests	319
Intrusion Forensics	319
Forensic Approach.....	319
Database Forensics.....	322
Log Forensics.....	323
Content Analysis	324
File Metadata Analysis	324

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Case Study: Apache Webserver Log Analysis..... 325
- TOR Forensics 330
 - How TOR Works 330
 - TOR Forensic Artifacts 330
 - Forensics Analysis of the TOR Browser 331
- Preventive Forensics..... 338
- Case Study: Website Hack..... 339
- Summary..... 343
- References..... 344
- Chapter 11: Emails and Email Crime 345**
 - Email Anatomy 345
 - Working of Email System 345
 - Protocols Used in Email Communication 347
 - Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) 347
 - Post Office Protocol (POP3) 347
 - Internet Mail Access Protocol (IMAP)..... 347
 - Email Crimes..... 348
 - Phishing..... 348
 - Spam 363
 - Email Harvesting 364
 - Email Bombing 364
 - Email Forensics..... 365
 - Recovering Emails..... 365
 - Some Techniques 366
 - Email Header Analysis 367
 - Case Study: Email Hoax..... 372
 - Bait Method 373
 - Case Study: e-Discovery from Enron Corpus..... 374
 - Case Study: Microsoft Internal Spam 377
 - Summary..... 377
 - References..... 378

Chapter 12: Solid State Device (SSD) Forensics	379
Solid State Drive	379
Components of SSD	380
Controller	381
Flash Memory	381
NAND Flash Memory	381
SATA Interface	382
SSD Concepts	382
TRIM	382
Garbage Collection	382
Wear Leveling	383
Overprovisioning	383
SSD Advantages	384
SSD Disadvantages	384
SSD Data Wiping	384
SSD Forensics Milestones	385
Comparison of SSD and HDD	386
Forensic Analysis of an SSD	387
Identification	389
Seizure	389
Imaging	389
Hashing	390
Analysis	390
Report	390
Preservation	391
Case Study: Acquisition of an SSD	391
Challenges in SSD Forensics	398
Data Recovery After Deletion	399
Summary	399
References	400

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Chapter 13: Bitcoin Forensics 401**
- Cryptocurrency..... 401
- Wallet..... 402
- Bitcoin 404
- Other Cryptocurrencies 405
- Blockchain 406
- How Blocks Get Added 407
- Cryptocurrency Artifacts and Investigation 408
- Procedure 409
- Tools 410
- Crimes Related to Bitcoin..... 411
- Using Bitcoins Over Dark Web for Illegal Purchase 411
- Ponzi Schemes 412
- Fake Exchanges, Wallets 412
- Cryptojacking 412
- Case Study: Clipper Hijacking Malware 413
- Challenges in Cryptocurrency Investigation..... 413
- Ownership Issue 413
- Lack of Software 413
- Cloud/Web Based 414
- Legal Issues..... 414
- Case Study: Founder Takes Password to His Grave..... 414
- Case Study: Silk Road..... 415
- Case Study: Storing Private Crypto Keys in the Cloud 416
- Tracking Bitcoin Transactions Using Maltego..... 417
- Numisight Bitcoin Explorer 425
- Summary..... 431
- References..... 432

Chapter 14: Cyber Law and Cyberwarfare	433
Cyberwarfare	435
Global Cyber Treaties	436
Budapest Convention (Convention on Cybercrime)	437
Tallinn Manual	437
Other Treaties	438
Cyber Law	438
Cyber Laws in the United States	438
General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).....	439
Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.....	443
International Cybercrime Investigation Challenges	443
Role of International Community.....	444
Recommendations to Government Bodies.....	446
Recent Case Studies	448
Illinois vs. Facebook	448
IBM Case	449
Apple’s iPhone.....	449
China’s New Cybersecurity Law and U.S.-China Cybersecurity Issues	450
Vietnam Rolls Out New Cybersecurity Law	450
Ohio’s Cybersecurity law	451
Social Media – A Game Changer	451
Summary.....	452
References.....	453
Chapter 15: Investigative Reports and Legal Acceptance	455
Understand the Purpose of the Report.....	457
Prep Work for Report Writing	457
Writing the Report.....	459
Structure of the Report	460
Plan the Coverage	465

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conclusion and Analysis	465
Recommendations	466
Characteristics of a Good Report	466
Document Design and Good Writing Practices.....	469
Legal Acceptance.....	471
Reporting Feature in Autopsy Tool	472
Reference.....	474
Index.....	475

About the Author



Niranjan Reddy is a renowned and passionate Information Security professional who specializes in Cyber Security and Digital Forensics, and who has an obsession for technology. He has hands-on experience in almost all domains of Information Security, specializing in Cyber Forensics. He is an Electronics graduate and possesses numerous international certifications under his belt. Here are some to name a few: MCSE, CCNA, Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH); Computer Hacking Forensics Investigator (CHFI); EC Council Certified Security Analyst (ECSA);

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Introduction

This book is a guide to practical digital forensics and provides a great collection of hands-on techniques and ample real-time examples followed by a few real-time case studies carried out by me. It starts with the fundamentals and introduction of cyber forensics with real-time cybercrime case studies and scenarios. The book then deep dives into the investigating process on various platforms like Windows, different distributions of the Linux System, and Apple's MacOS. One of the major challenges and hardships faced by any Forensics Investigator is the Anti-forensics techniques carried out by cybercriminals. In Network forensics, we talk of real-time packet analysis using numerous open source tools like Wireshark, Network Miner, and Xplico.

In today's digital world, everyone possesses a personal mobile device of their own, and the crime rates are alarmingly increasing. This book showcases how basic forensic analysis and evidence gathering can be done using Android and iOS mobile devices. The Cloud forensics chapter will provide you with details about Forensics as a Service (FaaS) and demonstrates hands-on forensic analysis of Google drive, Dropbox, and WhatsApp.

You will also learn about different malware attacks and how to analyze them as well as how the investigation process is carried out for them. Web attacks forensics covers how forensic investigation and analysis of web server logs and the Tor browser is done and how the dark net is accessed and used as a medium to carry out different crimes, followed by examples.

We discuss the investigation of email crimes like phishing and scamming with in-depth knowledge about email header analysis. You will learn about SSD forensics; and in this cryptocurrency age where payments in bitcoins are demanded by hackers, we will learn about various tools and techniques that can be used by a forensic investigator to analyze bitcoin transactions. Last but not least, we will learn about cyber laws and cyberwarfare followed by data protection regulations for different countries; and finally, cover how a forensics investigator should prepare and follow guidelines while preparing an investigative report.

INTRODUCTION

This book provides lots of real-time case studies and various examples on how to utilize open source tools available to carry out initial forensic investigations, along with the challenges being faced by forensics investigators.

Before reading this book, readers need to have some basic knowledge in IT security and ethical hacking. This will help you better understand the cyber forensics topics discussed in this book.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Cyber Forensics

The rise and growth of cyberspace have led to a chain of events that has shaped the world we live in. We have seen the rise of IT industries, which created millions of jobs all over the world either directly or indirectly. The start of e-commerce has revolutionized the shopping and retail industry. E-governance was adopted by nations all around the globe as it provided a better platform for administration and promoted transparent and efficient working practices. With the development of computer systems, the world has also witnessed the emergence of cybercrime. As computer-related crimes and incidents have increased, investigations have demanded the services of experts with knowledge of computer systems and law enforcement protocols. The pioneers of cyber forensics were computer hobbyists and law enforcement officers who would share their knowledge to investigate computer-related crimes. Over the past years, the world has witnessed computer-related crimes, which have directly or indirectly harmed people or organizations; a term was coined for them – cybercrime.

The traditional methods of crime investigation do not hold well in the case of cybercrimes. Hence, in order to combat such crimes, a new approach toward crime investigation was needed. This led to the development of Computer Forensics/Cyber Forensics/e-discovery (electronic evidence discovery)/Digital Forensics, which are all relevant and mean relatively the same thing. Our aim with this book is to fortify your knowledge about cyber forensics by showcasing standard and advanced digital and cyber forensic tools and techniques.

CYBERWARFARE

Cyberwarfare is termed to mean a target in a battlespace or warfare context of computer systems and networks. It involves both offensive and defensive operations leading to the threat of cyberattacks, espionage, and sabotage.

Cyber Warfare in 2019 is going to be massive. National Cyber Security Center (NCSC) revealed in a report that it recorded 34 “significant” cyberattacks that demanded a cross-government response last year.

The report discusses the cyber attacks’ immense financial impact on the National Health Service (NHS). The attack infected over 200,000 computers in 150 countries. These computers included government, health care, and private systems. Governments around the world are preparing for bigger cyberattacks during the upcoming elections in 2019.

What Is Cyber Forensics?

Cyber forensics is a discipline that involves investigation and analysis techniques to gather and preserve evidence from a particular electronic or digital device, which is a suspect in an investigation, in such a way that the evidence is suitable for presentation in a court of law. The goal of cyber forensics is to perform a structured investigation while maintaining the integrity of evidence and a documented chain of custody for evidence to find out exactly what happened on a suspect device and who was responsible for it. Cyber forensics plays a major and crucial role in cybercrime investigations.

Forensics is the practice of identifying, collecting, preserving, analyzing, and documenting digital evidence. Forensic investigators use a variety of techniques and forensic software applications to examine the collected digital images of the suspect device. Investigators search for hidden folders and unallocated disk space for copies of deleted, encrypted, or damaged files. Any evidence found on the image of the suspect drive is carefully documented in a final report written by the investigator and verified with the original device, before preparing for legal proceedings.

A Brief About Cyber Forensics

The digital revolution started in the 1980s when IBM PCs were rolled out for the public. These systems were powerful but had relatively few programs. Computer hobbyists got hooked on to these devices as it enabled them to write code and play around with the hardware.

The rise of computers also led to a rise in computer-based crimes. Computers were used to hack telephone systems

In 1984, the FBI Magnetic Media program was created, which later became the Computer Analysis and Response Team (CART). CART along with Seized Computer Evidence Recovery Specialist (SCERS), Electronics Crimes Special Agent Program (ECSAP), and Defense Computer Forensics Laboratory (DCFL) were the first recognized efforts to combat cybercrime.

In 1987, Access Data was formed, which is recognized as the pioneer in cyber forensics.

The FBI hosted the first International Conference on Computer Evidence, which was held at Quantico in 1993 and was attended by representatives of 26 nations. Unanimously, it was decided they would share experiences and provide assistance to each other. In 1995, the International Conference on Computer Evidence (IOCE) was formed, which was attended by the same representatives from the 26 nations. Again, the participating nations agreed to share experiences and provide assistance to each other. In 1998, IOCE was commissioned by the G8 to establish international guidelines, protocols, and procedures for digital evidence.

Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence (SWGDE) was a collective of law enforcement personnel, forensic laboratory scientists, and commercial company employees who worked together for the development of cross-disciplinary guidelines of digital evidence. In 2002, SWGDE published their work, "Best Practices for Computer Forensics."

In 2004 the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime took place, where an international treaty was signed that recognized crimes committed via the internet on computer systems and networks, copyright infringement, child pornography, fraud, etc.

ISO published the ISO 17025 General Guidelines for the competence of testing and calibrating laboratories in 2005.

Cyber forensic tools soon started to make their stride; Encase by Guidance Software and FTK by Access Data spearheaded the commercial tools category, thus becoming a huge success and gaining legal acceptance while the open source community created Sleuth Kit and Autopsy browser, which were used for Linux.

Forensics Investigation Process

The goal of performing a cyber forensics investigation is to gain thorough information about the event. It involves finding and analyzing the digital evidence related to the investigation. Cyber Forensic Experts follow the basic steps of investigation; the intricacies of these steps may vary as per the model of the organization in charge of the investigation.

The Forensic Investigation Process includes various forensic processes such as identification, seizure, imaging, hashing, analysis, report, and preservation during a digital forensic investigation as shown in Figure 1-1.

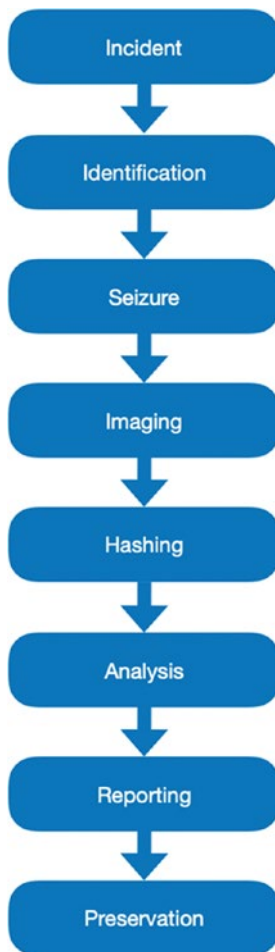


Figure 1-1. *Forensic Investigation Process*

Incident

This is the occurrence of a cybercrime instance where digital devices like computers, mobile devices, etc., have been used to commit a crime.

Identification

Identification is a crucial step in the forensic examination process. It directly affects efforts to develop a plan of action and ultimately the success of the investigation.

Before starting a digital forensic examination, the scope of actions must be identified:

- Who are the prime suspects?
- What are the best sources of potential digital evidence that will be further investigated?

This information will help the investigator in many ways, so that:

- No essential evidence is missed that might affect a case.
- Costs can be estimated in advance for the investigation, and the scope of the case can be adjusted accordingly.

Seizure

Prior to the actual examination, digital media related to the investigation will be seized. In criminal cases, law enforcement personnel, trained technicians to ensure that the evidence is not tampered with, often perform seizing the digital evidence. There are various laws that cover the seizure of digital media. For example, in any criminal investigation, there are laws related to search warrants, which will be applicable here.

Imaging

After successfully seizing digital evidence, a forensic image of this evidence is created for further analysis. This image is a bit-stream copy which is an exact bit-by-bit copy of a computer's physical storage device (SSD or HDD). Forensic image formats include disk dump (dd) and encase image file format (.E01). This image contains all the files and folders along with deleted files present on the hard disk of the digital evidence. The forensic image should be created with hashing and without tampering with the contents of the digital evidence, so that it can be admissible in a court of law.

Hashing

After successfully obtaining the forensic image of the digital evidence it is important to maintain the integrity of the image. To ensure such integrity a hash value is created for every forensic image using various hashing algorithms such as MD5 (Message Digest 5), SHA1 (Secure Hash Algorithm), and SHA256. The hash value is generated in accordance to the contents of the data stored in the digital evidence. Any tampering with evidence will result in a different hash value, and thus the digital evidence will not be admissible in a court of law.

Analysis

After the process of imaging and hashing, the evidence is taken for forensic analysis by a forensic examiner to look out for findings that can support or oppose the matters in the investigation. During the analysis the forensic examiner should maintain the integrity of the digital evidence.

Reporting

Upon completion of a forensic analysis, all the relevant findings should be presented in a report format by the forensic investigator. The investigator cannot present their personal views in this report. This report should be precise and must consist of conclusions drawn from the in-depth analysis. It should be easily understandable by any non-technical person such as the law enforcement agency staff.

Preservation

Once evidence is collected, it is important to protect it from any type of modification or deletion. For example, it might be necessary to isolate host systems such as desktops (a suspect system in forensic investigation) from the rest of the network through either physical or logical controls, network access controls, or perimeter controls. It is also important that no other users access a suspect system.

Forensic Protocol for Evidence Acquisition

The basic aim when handling any digital crime scene is to preserve the evidence. According to the circumstances of the crime and the constraints on the digital investigator, the nature and extent of the digital evidence are decided. Therefore, evidence acquisition is led according to an offense category.

This protocol is the basic approach for evidence acquisition, and it can be made applicable in Computer Forensics. This protocol is followed for all Operating Systems like Windows, Linux, Mac, etc. The forensic protocol for the evidence acquisition process is shown in Figure 1-2.

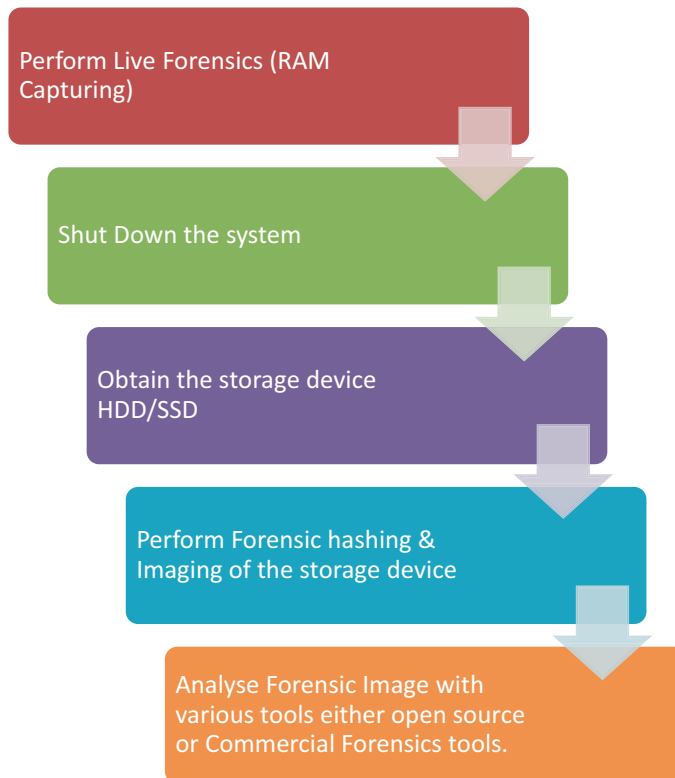


Figure 1-2. *Forensic protocol for evidence acquisition*