

Notary Tip: When The Signer Doesn't Match Their ID



Shocking pink hair, multiple piercings, and a neck tattoo. The person seated across from you looks nothing like the middle aged, silver haired woman on her ID. Midlife crisis? Or is it fraud?

Or, what about an individual who has just undergone significant weight loss surgery, grown a full beard that obscures his face, or removed that beard?

The most important duty of a Notary is to verify the identity of the signer. And the fact that your signer does not resemble their ID photo certainly raises a red flag. But it doesn't mean that the signer is an imposter.

While a visual match between the ID photo and the person present is preferable, the challenge arises when the match is not obvious. A lack of absolute visual match is not necessarily a reason to reject the ID. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when faced with this challenge:

Don't Rely Solely On Variable Physical Traits

A person's [appearance changes over time](#), and sometimes frequently. Features such as hair style or color, weight, facial hair, and whether a person wears contacts or eyeglasses are all subject to change. In states with varying driver's license terms and renewal policies, the ID photo may be 10, 15 or 20+ years old.

For instance, **Arizona** only requires a new photo every 12 years, one of the longest terms in the nation. Even when someone renews their driver's license, many states do not require them to get a new photo.

So when examining the ID, consider the following:

Look at the birthdate to see if the signer appears to be the appropriate age.

Look at fixed traits such as ear shape and placement, jaw or chin shape, eye shape, or distance between facial features.

Look at the person's general physical description (height, weight, color of eyes or hair, etc.).

If a single element is different but the other information on the ID (signature, height, etc.) is reasonably accurate, take that into account when deciding whether to accept the ID.

Look Beyond Physical Evidence Of Identity

As part of your process, ask the signer basic questions about the information on the ID.

What is their zip code?

What is their birthdate or astrological sign?

What is the number of their street address?

You should also observe their behavior. Are they trying to rush you or spontaneously provide justification as to why their signature or appearance doesn't match?

Ask For Another ID

If concerned, you can ask the signer for another ID. Several states' laws, including a new **Pennsylvania** law taking effect in October, allow a Notary to do this. What is acceptable as a second form of ID will vary from state to state, so be sure to know your [state's requirements](#). For instance, **California** has a very specific list of acceptable forms of identification. It should also be noted that in California a Notary cannot "mix and match" IDs, using the photo from one ID and the physical description from another. A single ID must meet the requirements.

Some states allow for the use of [credible identifying witnesses](#). However, in states such as **California** and **Florida** credible witnesses aren't an option when a person's ID doesn't check out because the witness must swear that the signer does not have an ID listed in statute.

Ultimately, you are expected to make a reasonable judgment. If in your review of a signer's ID you reasonably conclude that the signer is not an imposter, then you can proceed with the notarization. However, if you are not convinced the signer is who they say they are, you can and should refuse to go forward.