

# The Genealogical Proof Standard: A Guide for Genealogical Research

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## Introduction

When conducting genealogical research, every effort should be made to follow and uphold the tenets of the Genealogical Proof Standard. The Genealogical Proof Standard was developed between 1997 and 2000 by the Board of Certification of Genealogists, a certifying body for genealogists founded in 1964. Following the GPS ensures the accuracy of your family tree and establishes you as a credible researcher. These guidelines are designed to help genealogists establish well-supported conclusions about their ancestors.

### 1. Reasonably Exhaustive Research

*Definition:* Conduct thorough research (within reason).

#### Key Points:

- Explore a wide variety of sources: Census records, vital records, wills, deeds, newspapers, family knowledge, DNA, and more.
- Gather both original and derivative evidence (transcripts, extracts, family histories).
- Determine if the information found is primary or secondary information.
- Consider both direct, indirect, and negative evidence to create a comprehensive picture.
- Investigate multiple generations, collateral lines, and extended family members for context.

### 2. Complete and Accurate Source Citations

*Definition:* Cite all sources used in your research accurately.

Can another researcher easily find your source? A family tree with no sources should not be trusted.

#### Key Points:

- Document the title, author, publication date, page numbers, and repository of each source.
- Follow a recognized citation style (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style, APA, or MLA).
- Citations should be precise and allow others to easily locate the same sources.

### 3. Thorough Analysis and Correlation

*Definition:* Examine and compare all collected evidence to draw logical conclusions.

It's unlikely your great-grandmother was married to two different men with differently named children on opposite sides of the country in June of the 1880 census. The names might match, but is it logical?

#### Key Points:

- Analyze each piece of evidence critically, considering its quality, reliability, and relevance.
- Correlate evidence from different sources to build a cohesive narrative.
- Identify conflicting or contradictory information and attempt to reconcile it.

#### 4. Resolution of Conflicting Evidence

*Definition:* Address conflicting evidence and fill gaps in your research.

If evidence conflicts, it doesn't mean you get to choose the one you like better.

##### **Key Points:**

- Address conflicts by conducting additional research or evaluating the reliability of conflicting sources.
- If gaps exist in your research, acknowledge them and plan to fill them in the future.
- Document your reasoning and the steps taken to resolve conflicts or fill gaps.

#### 5. A Soundly Reasoned, Coherently Written Conclusion

*Definition:* Present your findings in a clear and logical manner.

##### **Key Points:**

- Summarize your research, analysis, and conclusions in a well-organized narrative.
- Write a Proof Statement, Proof Summary, or Proof Argument as determined by the evidence gathered or not gathered.
  - *Proof Statement* – (direct evidence) A statement directly answering the question.
  - *Proof Summary* – (direct evidence) Tables, notes, or lists of sources that support a conclusion.
  - *Proof Argument* – (indirect, complex, or conflicting evidence) a well-reasoned and carefully documented explanation of a research problem, the process by which it was solved, and the evidence that supports the conclusion.
- Clearly state your conclusion, indicating its level of confidence (e.g., "conclusively proven" or "highly likely").
- Include citations and references to support your conclusions.

#### **Conclusion**

The Genealogical Proof Standard is the cornerstone of responsible and reliable genealogical research. By following these five components, you'll not only uncover your family's history but also contribute to the preservation of accurate genealogical information for future generations. Have fun researching!

#### **Further Reading**

bcgcertification.org, *bcgcertification.org*, (<http://bcgcertification.org> : accessed 8 October 2023), Genealogical Proof Standard.

Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation & Source Usage*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2015).

Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*, (Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2013).