



# Lineage in Context: Creating a Compelling Kinship-Determination Project

*Sponsored by the Board for Certification of Genealogists*

---

Angela Packer McGhie, CG®, FUGA ▪ [mcghiefamilyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:mcghiefamilyhistory@gmail.com)

---

“Our challenge is to write each person’s story so well that the world is tempted to read it—and so faithfully that ancestors could actually recognize themselves.”

Elizabeth Shown Mills<sup>1</sup>

While a Kinship Determination-Project, or KDP for short, generally refers to a work sample submitted to the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) to apply for the Certified Genealogist® credential, anyone can use this format to write about their ancestry. The structure is useful for documenting the details of any ancestor's life. Our families are generally most interested in their ancestors' stories.

The purpose of the KDP is “kinship determination,” or in other words, accurately reconstructing families. This is done both through the proofs of parentage and the child lists. Every person's relationship to their parents should be verified and documented.

The goals of a KDP for BCG are to:

- Accurately place each person within the family. That is what we do as genealogists.
- Place the individuals in the context of the time and place they lived.
- Demonstrate the work meets the Genealogical Proof Standard.

## ***The BCG Application Guide***

If you are preparing a KDP for BCG, follow the instructions in *The BCG Application Guide* at <https://www.bcgcertification.org/become-a-certified-genealogist#application-guide>.

The 2025 edition of *The BCG Application Guide* made a few changes, including:

- Format the KDP as a descending narrative lineage (not a genealogy or a pedigree)
- Label each proof summary or argument
- Utilize Appendix C, which provides details on formatting a narrative lineage

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Goodbye, Begats? Hello, History!” *NGS Quarterly* 88 (December 2000), p. 243.

## Elements of a Narrative Lineage

A KDP documents three consecutive generations. For each generation, include the following elements:

- 1) A **genealogical summary** of the couple with birth, marriage, and death dates and places; the birth, death, and parents of the spouse, all with full documentation.
- 2) A **proof summary or proof argument** detailing the evidence that links an individual to their parents in two different generations. This can apply to any individual in the generation, not just the person carried forward. Label the sections for these proofs.
- 3) A **biographical sketch** detailing significant events in the subjects' lives and placing them in historical context. This includes details of their activities, residences, occupation, family, and circumstances.
- 4) A **child list** detailing the subject's children in birth order and documenting their birth, marriage, and death, along with the name(s) of their spouse(s). This list includes all children, including stepchildren and adopted children.

“**Proof summaries** are documented lists or narratives stating facts that support or lead to a proved conclusion.

**Proof arguments** are documented narratives in which genealogists explain why the answer to a complex genealogical problem should be considered proved.”<sup>2</sup>

## Use the Rubrics and Standards as a Guide

The evaluation rubrics for the Kinship-Determination Project can be found in “Part 1” at <https://bcgcertification.org/become-a-certified-genealogist#cg-application-rubrics>. These rubrics list each of the standards evaluated for each topic. It is wise to study the standards and follow them closely.

Pay particular attention to these standards to help you write your narrative lineage.<sup>3</sup> Below are the key concepts, but it is important to read the full standard as you work on your project.

- Standard 12 – Board context
  - Consider sources for the relevant time and place; boundary changes and migration routes; historic, economic, legal, religious, and social factors.

---

<sup>2</sup> Thomas J. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013), pages 86-87.

<sup>3</sup> Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogical Standards*, second edition revised (Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing Company, 2021), pages 12-14, 28, & 40.

- Standard 14 – Topical breadth
  - Consult sources naming the subject, family, and FAN club; include sources concerning agriculture, demographics, DNA, ethnicities, geography, history, laws, military activity, occupations, social customs, religions, etc.
- Standard 17 – Extent [of research]
  - The plan aims for reasonably exhaustive research; it gathers sufficient data to test hypotheses concerning identities and relationships; and thorough research emphasizes original records containing primary information.
- Standard 48 – Resolving evidence inconsistencies
  - Identify evidence that supports each side of a conflict and articulate a defensible rationale. (3 methods listed in this standard)
- Standard 50 – Assembling conclusions from evidence
  - Credible conclusions may rest on direct, indirect, or negative evidence; they place individuals accurately in their families.
- Standard 73 – Biographical information
  - Include descriptive biographical narrative in addition to vital statistics. These details provide sufficient information about each person’s activities, residences, circumstances, contributions, and lifestyle to uniquely identify them within the context of their historical era, society, and geographic place.

## **The KEY to Success is Demonstrating the Genealogical Proof Standard**

1. Conduct reasonably exhaustive research.
  - This applies to every section.
  - Search for records to corroborate the evidence.
  - For the biographical sketch, search for records documenting most decades of the couple’s lives.
  - Dig deep for records, including manuscripts, military, probate, church, agricultural census, and unusual records.
  - See the glossary definition of ‘reasonably exhaustive research’ in *Genealogy Standards* for guidance.
2. Write complete citations.
  - Be sure citations include the five elements in Standard 5.
  - Document every statement of fact.
  - Follow *Evidence Explained* as a guide.
  - Create your own citation template for the sources you use more than once. This helps with consistency.
  - You may need to cite one source for a birth date and another to document the link to their parents.

- You may use short-form citations for subsequent references to the same source, but it is not required. (Standard 7)
  - It is wise to include full URLs in the citations.
  - Study chapter 2 on the “Fundamentals of Citation and Style” in *Evidence Explained*.
3. Demonstrate analysis and correlation in your project.
- The proof summaries and proof arguments are essential to show your analysis and correlation skills. Remember to demonstrate that all records refer to the same person in a proof.
  - The source selection and citations will also demonstrate analysis and correlation.
  - Analyze the records collected for each person or event and evaluate for reliability.
  - Determine the best evidence to cite for each statement, including birth, marriage, death, and relationship to parents in the child lists.
  - Complex evidence is not required, but it does show your skill at building a proof argument.
  - If using DNA, correlate the genetic evidence with the documentary evidence.
  - Study chapter 1 on the “Fundamentals of Research and Analysis” in *Evidence Explained*.
4. Resolve conflicting evidence.
- When you come across inconsistent or conflicting evidence, take time to resolve and explain it. This is usually done in the proof summaries and proof arguments, but could also be addressed in the biographical sketch or child list.
  - Minor conflicts, such as a name variation or a minor inconsistency in birth date, can be resolved in a footnote.
  - See Standard 48 for guidance.
5. Write up conclusions.
- This project is full of conclusions. They are evident in the proof summaries and proof arguments, as well as the genealogical summaries and child lists.
  - The biographical sketch is also full of documented genealogical conclusions about the activities of the family.
  - Be as thorough as records allow, but remember the focus is on putting the family in historical context and not telling every story you can locate about the individuals (for individuals who appear in available histories or an abundance of records).
  - See Standard 50 for guidance.

### **Records with interesting details to add to a biographical sketch**

- |                                     |                         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Homestead applications            | • Passport applications |
| • Agricultural census schedules     | • Probate records       |
| • Manufacturing census schedules    | • Census records        |
| • Compiled military service records |                         |

## Possible Workflow for Writing a Narrative Lineage

1. Select a family to write about. This should be a family you like, as the project will take a lot of time and effort, but it will be worth it to produce a documented history of the family.
2. Create a locality guide and include all records available for the time and place.
3. Research the family thoroughly. You can integrate the research into the writing, but you should develop a solid understanding of all three generations of the family.
4. Study the historical context of the time and place(s) they lived.
5. Create a timeline for each couple as a guide to research and writing. Start with the census records to place the family in a location where you can search for additional records.
6. Create the structure of the project with sections for each generation and headers within each section for each of the four elements: genealogical summary, proof of parentage, biographical sketch, and child list.
7. Write the genealogical summaries and footnote each vital event.
8. Break the project into small chunks. This can be each section for each generation, or each topic in the individuals' lives you plan to write about. It feels good to accomplish them and check them off your list.
9. Set a schedule to finish specific goals. For example, write ten citations per day or write about one topic or event in the ancestor's life during each writing session.
10. Set aside time to write. We all love to research, but in order to finish the project you will need dedicated time to write.
11. Compare your work to the rubrics and review the related standards. The goal is to show that your work meets standards.
12. Study the *BCG Application Guide* to make sure you have followed the instructions.

## Examples of KDPs as Descending Narrative Lineages on the BCG Website

Sample Kinship Determination-Projects are available on the BCG website under "Family Histories" at <https://bcgcertification.org/learning/bcg-resources-key-skills#genealogical-work-samples>. The following examples use the new required descending narrative lineage format. Other samples on the website are useful to see the proof arguments, biographical sketches, and documentation.

Tomlinson, Leslie Watson, CG. [The Rickmonds: A Railroad Family.](#)" (2018).

Stallings, Faye Jenkins, CG. "[Following the Umbilical Line from Rachael Vowles to Her Granddaughter Amanda Ann Norris.](#)"(2018).

Wilds, Scott M., CG. "[Three Generations: From West Africa to the Great Migration.](#)" (2017).

## Resources for Further Study

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards*. Second edition revised. Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing Company, 2021.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual*. Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2000. This manual is outdated with respect to genealogical standards, but the appendices are useful because they contain instructions and examples of narrative lineages and genealogies.

Curran, Joan Ferris, Madilyn Coen Crane and John H. Wray. *Numbering Your Genealogy: Basic Systems, Complex Families and International Kin*. Arlington, Va.: National Genealogical Society, 2008. This book does not detail the numbering for a narrative lineage, but it provides guidance on complex families and the typography for the NGS *Quarterly* and *Register* systems.

Holmes, Eva. "Social Context in the Kinship Determination Project (KDP)." Webinar. 16 December 2025. *Legacy Family Tree Webinars*.  
<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/social-context-and-the-kdp/>

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Reasoning from Evidence." Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor. *Professional Genealogy: Preparation, Practice, and Standards*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2018.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Writing about, Documenting, and Publishing DNA Test Results," Debbie Parker Wayne, editor, *Advanced Genetic Genealogy: Techniques and Case Studies*. Cushing, Texas: Wayne Research (2019).

Leary, Helen. "Historical Background" Versus "Context." *OnBoard* 7 (January 2001): 1 and 6.

Leclerc, Michael J. "Crafting Family Histories." Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor, *Professional Genealogy: Preparation, Practice and Standards*. Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2018.

McGhie, Angela Packer. "Writing a KDP as a Narrative Lineage," *OnBoard* 29 (September 2023): 17–19. *Board for Certification of Genealogists*.  
<https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-writing-a-kdp-as-a-narrative-lineage>.  
(Edited to match the 2025 *BCG Application Guide*.)

Mill, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, 4th edition. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2024.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Historical Biographer's Guide to the Research Process*. Baltimore, Md: Genealogical Publishing, 2012.

\_\_\_\_\_, editor. "Putting Family History into Context." *A Special Issue of the National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. Vol. 88, No. 4 (December 2000).