



Genealogy Standards, 2nd edition

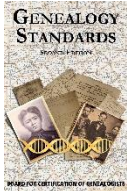
Details of the New and Modified DNA-related Standards

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After years of process, the Trustees for the Board for Certification of Genealogists approved a second edition of *Genealogy Standards* in October 2018. The small volume was released in March 2019. Besides preexisting, modified, and new DNA-specific standards, it includes a new introduction, the revised “Genealogist’s Code,” and updated appendixes.

The Disclaimer

I am an elected Trustee for the Board for Certification of Genealogists. I also chair the standing DNA Committee for that organization. I chaired the committee originally tasked with drafting the new DNA-related standards. I was involved in the ad-hoc committee charged with the revision of the DNA-related standards after the public comment period. Nonetheless, my opinions are my own and **DO NOT REPRESENT THE POSITION OF THE BOARD FOR CERTIFICATION OF GENEALOGISTS**. No individual under any circumstances speaks for BCG, except for the President with the endorsement of the full board.

Contractual obligations prohibit giving the complete wording of the modified and new standards today, but they are summarized here:

Chapter 2: “Standards for Documenting” Standard 2. Specificity

The addition to an existing standard says genealogists use citations to connect one or more sources or information items to each parent-child link. The rationale is that each link in a line of descent from a most recent common ancestor to a DNA test taker is a genealogical conclusion requiring documentation.

Chapter 3 “Standards for Researching,” section in “Reasoning from the Evidence” Standard 50. Assembling conclusions from the evidence

The addition to an existing standard says genealogists distinguish among types of familial relationships—such as adoptive or genetic—where appropriate. The rationale recognizes the degree to which genetic genealogists find misattributed parentage. They know that families come in many configurations and types, all equally valid. Without DNA data, genealogists cannot assume that every relationship is genetic.

Chapter 3: “Standards for Researching,” section on “Using DNA Evidence”

This new section contains seven new DNA-specific standards:

Standard 51. Planning DNA tests

This standard describes the characteristics of effective DNA testing plans, including previous test takers and new, targeted test takers. The rationale is that an efficient plan will include test takers and testing companies with the greatest potential to provide information to help answer a genealogical research question about a genetic relationship.

Standard 52. Analyzing DNA test results

This standard explains the reasoning required to reach conclusions about the presence or absence of genetic relationships. It lists eight factors essential to the reasoning process and addresses common errors in relationship conclusions.

Standard 53. Extent of DNA evidence

This standard discusses the characteristics of DNA evidence necessary to meet the requirement of the Genealogical Proof Standard for reasonably exhaustive research. The standard stresses the need to base genetic relationship conclusions on a sufficient number of DNA test results. Genetic relationship conclusions are rarely proven by comparing just two DNA samples. Thorough research helps researchers determine if all evidence points to one conclusion. It helps them resolve conflicts between evidentiary items and to discard competing hypotheses.

Standard 54. Sufficient verifiable data

This standard describes the level of detail necessary for others to verify or dispute the test results supporting a conclusion. Genetic evidence typically is an independent source of information about a genetic relationship. If readers cannot see the details of the shared DNA, the conclusion cannot be verified, and thus, resembles fiction.

Standard 55. Integrating DNA and documentary evidence

This standard describes the process of combining DNA and documentary evidence. The rationale is that documentary evidence provides the ability to run efficient and meaningful tests of the evidence supporting proposed genetic relationships.

Standard 56. Conclusions about genetic relationships

This standard says conclusions about genetic relationships require both DNA and documentary evidence. Genealogists can declare a relationship as genetic only when genetic evidence supports the conclusion. The rationale is based on the possibility of misattributed parentage. This new standard extends fundamental concepts and standards detailed in *Genealogy Standards* (2014). Proof arises only when all evidence, after successful resolution of conflicts, points to one conclusion. Genealogists do not overstate nor overplay the evidence. They use accurate terms to describe conclusions. They seek information about research questions in sources likely to provide high quality, independent sources. They plan to seek evidence in sources that might conflict with other evidence.

Standard 57. Respect for privacy rights

This standard describes the characteristics of informed consent for sharing living people's DNA test results. As a new standard and an addition to the Genealogist's Code of Ethics, informed consent is part of a genealogists' responsibilities to protect the public.

Chapter 4: "Standards for Writing," section on "Assembled Research Results" Standard 65. Content

This modification to an existing standard suggests additional options useful for clearly presenting genetic data, including genealogical charts and diagrams depicting proved or hypothesized relationships. Its rationale recognizes that readers can have difficulty grasping complex statistical data and hypothesized relationships when expressed only in words. Tables of numerical data and genealogical charts and diagrams can help improve clarity.

Chapter 4: “Standards for Writing,” section on “Special-Use Genealogical Products” Standard 74. Reports

This modification to an existing standard adds a new characteristic of a research report—explanation of deficiencies. The rationale is based on the Genealogical Proof Standard. If the evidence is insufficient to reach a conclusion, then it cannot be overplayed. Conclusions cannot be partially proved.

Do the Standards Require DNA for All Genealogical Research?

BCG, recognizing that DNA evidence is not always available or relevant, does not require applicants to use it. BCG does encourage applicants, if not all genealogical researchers, to consider the availability and potential usefulness of DNA evidence, like other sources of evidence, to help solve each genealogical problem they address. Besides the standards, at least four realities support that position:

- If a genealogist answers a question about a biological relationship, DNA evidence must help support the conclusion. Otherwise, the criterion of reasonably exhaustive research would be unmet. Concluding a genetic relationship is indefensible without supporting genetic evidence.
- Many genealogical research questions need not address biological relationships. Examples include questions that lead to sorting and identifying people with the same name, and questions that lead to merging information about different names into one identity. Genetic evidence can be part of the evidence answering such questions, but some conclusions about identity do not need it.
- Sometimes DNA evidence is unavailable because key parties decline testing or a test taker has no useful matches. Even when a researcher has sufficient test results, the test takers might not agree to have their data published or used in a BCG application.
- Researchers always should state the limitations of their conclusions, including relationship conclusions without genetic evidence that could overturn the conclusion. Genealogists can write, for example, that written records support a relationship without implying certainty that the relationship is biological.

The Future

BCG revised and released the new application guide and rubrics for evaluating how application portfolios meet the expanded standards. The revised application guide and rubrics is publicly available on BCG’s website (<https://bcgcertification.org/>). Current applicants, however, will continue to be subject to the standards and rubrics applicable when they submitted or last extended their preliminary applications. New preliminary applicants and previous applicants who request extensions will be evaluated under the *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd edition and the revised rubrics.

BCG's president writes about the future:

The Genealogical Proof Standard requires researchers to consider all relevant evidence. Such consideration includes DNA evidence. Research questions, potential answers, and documentary findings help genealogists decide whether DNA evidence could be relevant to their research. When it is, their actions and products respond to ethics considerations and meet standards specific to genealogy and genetic genealogy.¹

For nearly two decades, genealogists have used DNA to solve genealogical problems. The pioneers launched a significant citizen-scientist movement. Genealogical use of DNA evidence will continue to grow.

Conclusion

This set of DNA-specific standards evolved over two years. The evolution could not have occurred without passionate input from many volunteers. To achieve conciseness and clarity, each standard underwent multiple revisions and improvements. Each word and phrase received repeated scrutiny. The process involved heavy debate. Genealogists at all levels of experience participated. They included BCG's certificants and applicants, and genealogical leaders, professional genealogists, and family historians who work independently of BCG. Widely diverse opinions ultimately came into agreement. The field owes a debt of gratitude to everyone who provided feedback and opinions.

The presentation and panel discussion intends to provide full transparency about the process that led to new and revised standards for the use of genetic sources to solve genealogical problems. BCG invites and welcomes all genealogists and family historians to consider these standards as they turn to DNA testing to solve family mysteries and establish genetic relationships.

For a handy chart comparing the previous standards with the second edition, please see this chart created by Debbie Parker Wayne and available at the BCG website:

<https://bcgcertification.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Standards-Manual-2019v2014StdNumbers.pdf>

1. Richard G. Sayre, "Introduction to the Second Edition," in Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Turner, forthcoming), xiv.