

## GPS for GENEALOGY: ANOTHER KIND OF NAVIGATION



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Shellee Morehead, Ph.D, CG<sup>SM</sup>  
Email: [shellee@shelleemorehead.com](mailto:shellee@shelleemorehead.com)  
Website: [www.shelleemorehead.com](http://www.shelleemorehead.com)

GPS: Genealogical Proof Standard

A method for using sources, information, evidence and analysis to solve problems of identity and genealogical relationships.

### **Five Steps in the GPS**

- Thorough, reasonably exhaustive research in sources most likely to answer the question
- Complete citations to every source of information used in the solution
- Correlation and analysis of information and sources used in the solution
- Resolution of any conflicting evidence
- A well-written conclusion stating why the evidence supports your solution

### **Reasonably exhaustive research**

A reasonably exhaustive research includes searching all the sources available until you've searched enough sources to either answer the question, decide to go back to find more sources, or give up.

The sources should include census, probate, vital records, church records, military records, land, property, and other materials for the person of interest as well as for their spouse, children, parents, siblings and in-laws. If that doesn't answer the question you can expand the search to friends, neighbors and acquaintances (the "FAN" club).

### **Complete citations of each source**

Each source provides information to solve your question. Sometimes, not finding information in a particular source where it was expected can also provide information. Each source that you use must be properly cited so that you and others can evaluate the quality of the sources and information, can follow your logically presented information from those sources and arrive at a similar conclusion after having checked your sources.

### **Correlation and analysis of information and sources**

The information obtained from each source should fit into the solution to the problem that you are researching, even if it is the lack of information. Each source and piece of information needs to be placed into the correct historical, socioeconomic and chronological context to determine whether the information makes sense in relation to solution to the problem. The sources are classified as original, derivative, or authored; the information is either primary, secondary, or undetermined ; and the evidence is determined to be direct, indirect or negative.

Each of these classifications allows us and others, to determine the quality of the information to direct us to find the highest quality evidence, not the most often repeated information.

### **Resolve conflicting evidence**

Discrepancies in the evidence we find must be resolved in order to be confident that we have accurately answered the research question. Documents can contain inaccuracies, DNA may point to a different parentage or relationship than the documents, people lie and we need to determine why certain facts are in conflict with other facts. By resolving these discrepancies, we can arrive at the final step in the GPS.

### **A soundly reasoned, well-written conclusion**

Written proofs convey how and why we arrived at the solution to the original research question. We must defend in writing our interpretation of the documents, how we analyzed the information and why the solution we have presented is the most logical, and likely answer. By resolving conflicting evidence, and assembling our evidence, using cited sources, others reading our analysis should be able to follow our logic, and if they used all the same sources, should arrive at a similar conclusion.

Use of the Genealogical Proof Standard is the standard for all identities and relationships in genealogy and must be used in where there is no direct evidence, where evidence conflicts and where many sources can be used to arrive at a soundly reasoned, document supported answer to a specific research problem.

### **Websites:**

Board for Certification of Genealogists

[www.BCGCertification.org](http://www.BCGCertification.org)

Evidence Explained

<https://www.facebook.com/evidenceexplained>

Ancestry YouTube

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsc0AQkAh\\_2cQmxqwD6VWRw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsc0AQkAh_2cQmxqwD6VWRw)

### **Publications:**

*National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, Arlington, VA

*New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, [www.AmericanAncestors.org](http://www.AmericanAncestors.org), Boston, MA.

*The American Genealogist*. AmericanGenealogist.com.

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards*. Ancestry.com, NY, NY, 2014.

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. National Genealogical Society Special Topics Series, NGS Special Publication No. 107, Arlington, VA 2013.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: citing history sources from artifacts to cyberspace*. Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD, 2007.

Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard: Building a Solid Case*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Christine Rose, San Jose, California, 2009.