Standards for Genealogical Documentation

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> *The Book* Genealogy Standards *spells out eight documentation standards, which give genealogists guidance for documenting genealogical writing. The standards also provide guidance for citation content, while allowing flexibility in the sequencing and structuring of citations supporting genealogical statements. This presentation will review the standards and provide examples of applying their principles.*

Genealogy's standards	♦ Appeared by 1922 and evolved and diverged through the twentieth century
	♦ Used by BCG for evaluation since 1964
	♦ Organized in the late 1990s by BCG trustees with hundreds of years of wide-ranging domestic and international research experience and who were vetted and validated by respected genealogy credentialing programs and editorial boards
	♦ Published in 2000 and updated in 2014, 2019, and 2021
	♦ The only cohesive and comprehensive body of standards for genealogists
Documentation basics	♦ Documentation is the most important task that genealogists undertake. Without documentation, genealogical research results are nearly meaningless.
	♦ Documentation exists in a written product context—it does not exist in isolation.
	♦ Fully understanding a source is prerequisite to citing it. The source, not a "model," should drive what a citation includes and excludes to describe a source.
	♦ Effective citations require flexibility and artistry.
Reasons to document (prioritized)	1. To help you appraise the qualities of the sources you used and determine whether or not they provide a sound basis for your conclusions
	2. To help readers—consumers, clients, fellow researchers, relatives, and others—understand the qualities of the sources you used and, using your citations, *evaluate for themselves* whether or not your conclusions are sound
	3. To help you backtrack efficiently, should you need to re-examine a source
	4. To enable others to replicate your research—and to check your sources—to see if they come to the same conclusion
	5. To create the appearance of accuracy, credibility, polish, and professionalism

> "Records and artifacts are like all else in the universe: each can be unique in its own way. Therefore, once we have learned the principles of citation, we have both an artistic license and a researcher's responsibility to adapt those principles to fit materials that do not match any standard model."
>
> —Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained*, 41.

Standard 1. Scope [of documentation]	♦ All sources, information, and images that the genealogist uses, except those in any of three categories:
	♦ Material that arises solely from the genealogist's own conclusions, experience, observation, and opinions
	♦ Information that is widely known
	♦ Information that is indisputable
Standard 2. Specificity [of documentation]	♦ Genealogists' documentation explicitly connects:
	♦ each statement, part of a statement, or image requiring documentation *with*
	♦ the source and information supporting the statement or providing the image.
	♦ The connection leaves no doubt about which source and information supports each written statement or each specific part of a written statement.
Standard 3. Purposes [of documentation]	♦ To enable genealogists and consumers of their research to evaluate the genealogist's conclusions, statements, and sources:
	♦ By turning to the source, information, image or some combination of source, information, and image
	♦ By evaluating the credibility of each source, information item, and image that the genealogist used
	♦ By assessing the scope of the genealogists' research to understand whether it was reasonably thorough or not
Standard 4. Citation uses	♦ Standard 1 specifies what genealogists should document, implying what they should not or need not document. When providing written information that standard 1 requires be documented, genealogists craft source citations at various places and times:
	♦ Genealogists craft citations in all the written genealogical material they create, whether for a print environment or an electronic environment and whether the material is formal or informal.
	♦ Genealogists cite their sources at all phases of their research, starting with their research plans and ending with their final polished written products.
	♦ Genealogists preparing teaching materials craft citations for reference notes, reference lists, or both.
	♦ The places where genealogists' citations appear include articles, blogs and other online materials, books, case studies, charts, classroom materials, family histories, figures, forms, histories, lecture syllabus material, lineage-society applications, reports, research logs, research notes, research plans, and other materials.

Note: This syllabus material paraphrases the standards in *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. rev. (Nashville, Tenn.: Ancestry. com, 2021), 5–9. This material also mentions conventions and guidelines that the standards do not specify.

Standard 5. Citation elements

♦ Standard 5 defines the *content* of genealogical citations—what information the citation should contain and provide. By implication, standard 5 also indicates what information a genealogical citation should not, or need not, include.

♦ Per standard 1, genealogists use reference-note citations to document specific sources, information, and images that they used.

♦ Genealogical reference-note citations answer five questions, as applicable, about the sources, information, and images that the genealogist used. Those up-to-five answers become the citation's "elements" or content.

1. The content and extent of the answer to the *What* citation question can vary:

   ♦ The title of the entire source, if it has a title. That could be the title of a book, file, paper, website or other source. Conventionally, titles of publications are italicized in citations, and titles of unpublished material are not italicized.

   ♦ The source's title and one or more subtitles, if the source has them. Both title and subtitle conventionally are italicized in citations to publications.

   ♦ The title of the source and the title or title plus subtitle, if any, of a part of the source (for example, an article or a chapter, table, figure, section, subsection, or web page). Conventionally, the title of the part appears within quotation marks in citations and precedes the source's italicized title.

   ♦ Genealogists may add words after a title or subtitle to clarify the nature of the source or to provide information about it (for example, "2nd ed. rev." "3 vols.," :searchable database," "image," or "microfilm publication").

   ♦ Conventionally, titles and subtitles are capitalized headline style in citations, regardless of how they are capitalized in or on the source.

   ♦ If the source is untitled, the answer is the researcher's description of the source, capitalized sentence style. The description should be specific enough to distinguish the source from any similar surrounding material.

   ♦ If the source's title is convoluted or uninformative, genealogists may answer the question with their own or a conventional description instead of the convoluted or uninformative title.

   ♦ The answer to *What* appears in the citation's second field (after the answer to *Who*) in most citations.

   Note: The answers to the other four citation questions apply to the researcher's answer to the *What* citation question.

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**Standard 5.
Citation
elements**
(continuing)

2. The content of the answer to the *Who* citation question can vary:

    ♦   The name of the source's author, creator, or informant—as it was at the time the source was created—if the researcher can identify that author, creator, or informant

    ♦   The names of one, two, or three people. (If more than three authors, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, sect. 15.29, recommends citing the first author followed by "et al.")

    ♦   The name of a business, government (local, county, state, or national), religious organization, or any other kind of organization

    ♦   The answer can include abbreviated words describing a person's role other than author (for example, comp. [*compiler*], ed. [*editor* or *edited by*], or transl. [*translator* or *translated by*]).

    ♦   If the person creating the source did so as a routine part of employment (like a government clerk or a religious official), the answer is the person's employer—a government, organization, or religious body.

    ♦   The answer to *Who* appears first in most citations.

    ♦   You may omit the answer to *Who* in two situations:

        ♦   You cannot identify the source's author, creator, or informant.

        ♦   The name of the source's author, creator, or informant will appear elsewhere in the same citation.

3. The answer to the *When* citation question can be the date the source (the answer to *What*) was created, published, or modified; the date when you last accessed, downloaded, or viewed an online source, the event date in an unpublished source, or—sometimes—the recording date of an unpublished source.

    ♦   Depending on the source you are citing, the content of the *When* answer will vary:

        ♦   For journals and magazines, the answer to *When* usually is the month or season and year of publication placed in parentheses after the journal or magazine title and volume number.

        ♦   For newspapers, the answer to *When* is the issue's exact date, after the newspaper's place of publication, set off with commas.

        ♦   For online publications (websites), the answer to *When* is your exact and most recent viewing date placed in parentheses after a URL and a colon.

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**Standard 5.
Citation
elements**
(continuing)

♦ For books and similar offline publications (for example, microfilm publications and CD-ROM publications), the answer is the source's copyright or publication year in parentheses after the publication's place of publication and publisher's name.)

♦ For unpublished material, the answer usually is the source's date of a recorded event, recording, or both, set off with commas immediately after whatever it is the date of.

♦ If the date is unknown, you should estimate it and use words (like *about* or *between*) showing that the information is estimated. Less desirable but sometimes unavoidable is using the words *no date* (or its abbreviation, *n.d.*).

4. The content of the answer to the *Whereis* citation question depends on the nature of the source (the answer to *What*):

♦ If the source is unpublished, the answer to *Whereis* is the name of the repository (usually an office or building) where researchers can consult the source today, and its city and state.

♦ If the source is in an archive, historical society, or manuscript collection with multiple nested levels (for example, some combination of folder, box, collection, series, and record group), their names, numbers, or both also help answer *Whereis*. The sequence may vary, but specific-to-general (from sheet of paper to city and state, for example) is common for citing specific material in large repositories in the United States.

♦ If the source is a book or similar offline publication (for example, a microfilm publication or a CD-ROM publication), the answer to *Whereis* is the city and state of publication and the publisher's name, which may be shortened. Conventionally, this appears in parentheses with the publication or copyright date, and a colon follows the abbreviated name of the state.

♦ If the source is a newspaper, the answer to *Whereis* is its city and state. That answer usually follows the newspaper's name and is set off with either commas or parentheses.

♦ If the source is a journal or magazine, the answer to *Whereis* conventionally is omitted.

♦ If the source is an online publication (website or downloadable PDF), the answer to *Whereis* is a stable URL specific to the information, image, or page. If the specific URL is not stable, the answer is a collection or website URL that is stable.

♦ If the source is a publication, either offline or online, the answer to *Whereis* precedes the answer to the *Wherein* citation question, which is the citation's last field.

♦ If the source is unpublished, the answer to *Whereis* is the citation's last field.

(Section continues.)

**Standard 5.
Citation
elements**
(continuing)

4. The answer to the *Wherein* citation shows where within the source (the answer to *What*) other researchers can find the specific information that documents a statement you have written. The answer's content depends on the kind of source:

♦ If the source's leaves are numbered, the answer—or part of the answer—is a folio number or page number (or numbers).

♦ For bound and "loose" sources with no numbering, citations describe the material's arrangement (for example, *alphabetical by groom's surname*, *chronological by enlistment date*.) Only when no arrangement description will help someone locate the information item is *unpaginated* necessary.

♦ If the source is a published book or journal, the answer stops with the page number. If a newspaper, the answer to *Wherein* is page and column number.

♦ Besides folio or page numbering (if any), citations to unpublished sources supplement the answer to *Wherein* by mentioning the information item (for example, *Jones to Smith deed*, or *Johnson-Williams marriage*.

♦ This *Wherein* answer usually appears after the source title and any descriptive or parenthetical details, but it should follow what it refers to. (For example, a census's page numbers can refer to the page within a county, town, district within the county, or enumeration district.)

♦ The *Wherein* field is omitted if an entire source provides the documentation.

♦ The *Wherein* field also is omitted if the source is an unbound or filed sheet of paper or a single artifact (like a gravestone or stitched sampler).

♦ Citations in reference lists typically do not answer the *Wherein* citation question.

**Standard 6.
Format**

♦ Genealogists use flexible humanities-style citations, intended for researchers who frequently consult manuscript materials. They use current editions of two reference books advocating flexibility in adapting citations to particular sources:*

♦ *The Chicago Manual of Style*

♦ *Evidence Explained*

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*For details, see this syllabus material's reference list.

> "Like most of the 885 pages in *Evidence Explained*, the examples in this QuickLesson are 'food for thought,' not rigid rules. They cover a sampling of issues we frequently encounter, and are offered to help you think through what you are using and the manner in which those sources and their quality can be most-clearly identified."
>
> —Elizabeth Shown Mills, "QuickLesson 19," *Evidenceexplained.com*.

> "None of our recommendations are meant to foreclose breaking or bending rules to fit a particular case, something we continue to do ourselves."
>
> —*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed., xii.

> *Note:* This syllabus material paraphrases the standards in *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. rev. (Nashville, Tenn.: Ancestry .com, 2021), 5–9. This material also mentions conventions and guidelines that the standards do not specify.

Standard 7. Shortcuts

♦ Genealogists have two options besides abbreviations for saving space in footnotes:

   ♦ Use a shortened form to cite a source previously cited in full in the same printed work. Shortened citations conventionally use authors' surnames only and a shortened source title. They also omit publication or repository information and information about any medium through which a source was viewed.

   ♦ Use *ibid.* in a second citation to replace the information that would repeat information in the immediately prior citation in the same footnote or in the immediately preceding footnote, and only if that footnote contains only one citation. Note that in its most recent edition, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, at section 14.34, discourages using *ibid.*

Standard 8. Separation safeguards

♦ Genealogists sharing or filing their documented writing maintain the connections betwewen their citations and the statements and items they document. Besides using footnotes and endnotes, the safeguards include ensuring that pages are firmly attached and photocopies have citations on the fronts.

Reference lists

♦ Strictly speaking, reference lists (a.k.a. bibliographies or source lists) do not document. Instead they list sources related to a topic or the sources that a researcher consulted for a particular project.

♦ Genealogists use reference lists most often for teaching materials. Sometimes they use them in family histories or reports to show groups of sources they consulted.

Comparison of types of citations

REFERENCE-NOTE CITATIONS		REFERENCE-LIST CITATIONS
FULL	SHORTENED	
Used once, for first citation to a source	Used one or more times after first citation	Appear at end of book or handout
Common in articles, books, and reports		Used in books, handouts, and reports
Document statements by pointing to specific information		Show research or topical scope; do not point to specific information
Sentence format		Paragraph format
Punctuated mostly with commas and semicolons	Punctuated mostly with commas	Punctuated mostly with periods
Contain all required elements	Trigger recall of prior full citation	Contain all elements except item of interest
Sequenced as needed to document writing		Alphabetized; may be categorized
Author's first name first	Author's surname only	First author's last name first

Standards for Genealogical Documentation

Citation sequences

♦ How citations sequence the answers to the five citation questions varies with the source and citation context. Two sequences are common:

   ♦ If the source is a PUBLICATION, the answers appear in the *Who-What-Whereis-When-Wherein* sequence.

   ♦ If the source is UNPUBLISHED, the answers often appear in the *Who-What-When-Wherein-Whereis* sequence.

Suggestions for citing online images

♦ If the source is ORIGINAL ONLINE MATERIAL THAT DID NOT EXIST OFFLINE, use the sequence for citing a publication, just above.

♦ If the source shows IMAGES FROM A PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED OFFLINE SOURCE (like a book, journal, microfilm publication, or newspaper), in finished products use the sequence for publications, just above, and cite the offline publication only. In your notes or work in progress, you will want to append to that citation enough information about the online image to locate it easily, if not to turn directly to it.

♦ If the source shows IMAGES OF OFFLINE MATERIAL THAT NEVER WAS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED, you have three options:

   ♦ Cite the website as a publication, using the sequence above. After the image number (the answer to *Wherein*), answer the W*ho, What, When,* and *Wherein* questions, as applicable, about the underlying material. You need not cite the underlying material's physical repository *(Whereis)*.

   ♦ Using the sequence for unpublished material, cite the underlying material, but omit its answer to *Whereis*. After a semicolon and a conjunction (like "image"), answer, as applicable, the *Who, What, Whereis,* and *Wherein* questions for the website.

   ♦ Cite the underlying unpublished material in full, including the answer to *Whereis*. After a semicolon and a conjunction, cite the online publication in full. This longer option is useful for working notes and works in progress.

Essential resources

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd edition revised. Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry, 2021.

The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. The essential guide to writing, publishing, and editing.

Jones, Thomas W. *Mastering Genealogical Documentation*. Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2017. A textbook with exercises. Also available as a Kindle e-book.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, 3rd edition revised. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2017. Also available as a Kindle e-book. The essential guide to citing genealogical sources.

———. *Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citation and Source Usage.* http://evidenceexplained.com : 2021. Blog, lessons, and discussion forum.