TMG AND THE GENEALOGICAL PROOF STANDARD (GPS)

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THE GENEALOGICAL PROOF STANDARD

1. Reasonably exhaustive research
2. Complete and accurate source citations
3. Thorough analysis and correlation
4. Resolution of conflicting evidence
5. Soundly written conclusion based on the strongest evidence

MY TMG CUSTOMIZATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Reasonably exhaustive research

- Reasonably exhaustive research includes local histories, maps, atlases, customs, and laws.
- Only sources linked to a person are exported from TMG. Consider creating a *pseudo-person* to link sources not immediately relevant to an individual or to serve as a collection point for background research.
- Custom TMG event tag: **BACKGROUND**. Memo contains details from the source required to analyze, understand, and interpret a record; e.g., a law, a map, or a history note. Aside: Do you use TMG's HISTORY tag? That tag would be good for this, too, but make sure the tag is can be included within your customary report or export.
- TMG report: "List of Sources preview". The default report is included as one of the buttons in the "Reporting" section of the toolbar. Run the report for the focus individual and examine it for time span, geographic coverage, and variety of records.
- TMG report: When reviewing research for a group of individuals: (1) Collect individuals in a TMG focus group; (2) Run the "Individual Detail" report selecting the current focus group, include all tag types, and include the "Bibliography" under Publication Tools. Examine this bibliography for time span, geographic coverage, and variety of records.

Complete and accurate source citations

- Enter every source searched, regardless of result.
- Because bibliography reports are important, construct source type templates so the bibliography is arranged in a manner that allows easy analysis of the research scope.
- A "complete and accurate" source citation demonstrates the quality of the record and its information, not just where the source can be found. This takes precedence over "easy."

Thorough analysis and correlation

- All tables, spreadsheets, and research reports should be linked as exhibits to a person, tag, or source in TMG. **Exhibit log > Right-click** in the exhibit icon area **> Insert new exhibit (other) > Navigate** to the desired file.
- Custom TMG event tag: **RESEARCH**. This is a dedicated tag used for more extensive proof summaries, explanations of analysis and correlation of like objects, and summary findings. It is also a good place to record "searched but nothing found" information

(negative findings), and can augment or substitute for TMG's research log. The latter is not exported, except in a "List of research tasks" report.

Resolution of conflicting evidence

- Custom TMG relationship tag: **-CAN**. The (Relation)-CAN tag preserves a separation between a hypothesized relationship and a relationship based on a conclusion. When a conclusion is reached, the tag is changed to a standard relationship tag. A written proof (statement, summary, or argument) is required. TMG users planning to migrate to another software program should be aware that the -CAN suffix does not export. It is a good idea to include a note in the memo field stating that the relationship is hypothetical, even if using the -CAN tag.
- Custom TMG relationship tag: **IDENTITY**. The IDENTITY tag links two people of the same name who might or might not be the same person. Data for the two are carefully kept separate, other than this IDENTITY tag, until a conclusion is reached. The memo field can contain a description of the problem, but when a conclusion is reached, I convert this tag to a RESEARCH tag and enter a proof summary in the memo field. TMG users planning to migrate to another genealogy program should be aware that P2 will be converted to a witness, assuming the new software allows witnesses.
- Custom TMG relationship tag: **RELATION**. A record might contain a direct statement of a relationship other than that of parent-child or spouse-spouse. A RELATION tag links two people and shows that stated relationship. Although sibling relationships could be shown by creating an Unknown Parent, more distant relationships are not so easily demonstrated. The RELATION tag also preserves the direct statement of relationship. TMG users planning to migrate to another genealogy program should be aware that P2 will be converted to a witness, assuming the new software allows witnesses.
- Custom TMG event tag: **-ALT** tag. The -ALT tag (usually a BMDB tag) provides a place for conflicting information and its corresponding citations. As new evidence is obtained, an -ALT tag is easily converted to the standard tag. The presence of an -ALT tag reminds the researcher that conflicting evidence exists and must be resolved. This resolution requires a proof summary or proof argument.

Soundly written conclusion based on the strongest evidence

- Note that data entered in a TMG tag, such as a birth or death event, constitute a conclusion. In itself, that one tag is unlikely to demonstrate context and scope of research.
- If a conclusion is based on two or more *independently created* records and the evidence is direct and self-evident, a *proof statement* suffices. This is usually a conclusion statement followed by a list of sources. TMG report: A source-cited family group sheet that demonstrates the scope of the research can substitute for this list.
- A *proof summary* is required if a conclusion is based on direct evidence that is not self-evident. If there is any conflicting evidence, it is easily explained. A short proof summary can usually be entered in the relevant tag memo field. Longer proof summaries can be entered in a RESEARCH tag. All sources used to reach the conclusion must be cited to the tag. TMG's embedded citations can be used if your source templates do not employ split citation details.
- A *proof argument* is required for any conclusion that requires a discussion of indirect evidence or negative evidence or the resolution of significant conflicting evidence. If the explanation doesn't fit conveniently in a TMG tag's memo field, write a source-cited proof argument.

Your proof argument is now a source. Add it to the Master Source list, cite it where appropriate, and attach the document to the source, the person, or the tag.

DEFINITIONS

Records

Original record. An original record is the account of an event that is not based on a prior record. The original record may contain incorrect information, but it is less likely to contain copy errors. An image copy of an original record can be treated as the original record only if it shows no signs of alteration. Note, however, that an image copy may contains less information than the original, since it may be unable to convey all the contextual information found in the original, such as erasures or different ink colors.

Derivative record. The transcription, abstract, index, or translation of an original record is a derivation of that record. It is may be less accurate than the original, since errors in reading, interpreting, and recording might have been introduced.

Authored work. An authored work does not simply list information. It is a synthesis of information, interpretations, inferences, and conclusions, and it is colored by the author's level of expertise – and by the author's bias. It may add valuable insight to your research, but it may also lead you in the wrong direction.

Information

Primary information. Identifying the informant is important when determining the reliability of information. Did the person reporting the information have first-hand knowledge of the event? Was the information recorded shortly after the event occurred, or was it recorded from memory many years later? Primary information is not synonymous with accurate information. Could the informant be biased? Was there a reason the informant might have shaded the truth? Note that primary information is not restricted to original sources. If it was primary information in the original record, it is primary information in all that record's derivative forms.

Secondary information. Based on hearsay.

Indeterminable information. The information in a record may be completely accurate, but its reliability is difficult to determine if its creator is unknown. Even if the informant is known, it may be difficult to determine his or her expertise or bias.

Evidence

Direct evidence. It answers the research question without the need for any other information. Direct evidence compiled from the primary information found in an original record is no guarantee of truth. Even this evidence must be correlated with related evidence compiled from *independently created* sources. Is there good correlation, or are there conflicts or questions? These must be resolved, or any conclusion reached may be invalid.

Indirect evidence. On its own, it does not answer the research question, but when combined with evidence from other independently created sources, a valid conclusion may be reached.

Negative evidence. Evidence that should exist if a conclusion is valid, but doesn't, is *negative evidence*. For example, the research hypothesis states that Person A served in a given company in the Civil War. His name is not found on any original muster roll or pay roll for that company, however, and there appear to be no gaps in those records. This constitutes *negative* evidence and suggests that the hypothesis is invalid. Negative evidence is not synonymous with *negative findings*. The latter term is used to refer to sources that could not be located.

Proof

Proof statement. "At least two citations demonstrate that a conclusion's accuracy requires no explanations."[1] Must be within thoroughly documented context demonstrating adequate research scope.

Proof summary. Can be used when evidence is direct and conflicts are minor and easily resolved, but conclusion still requires some explanation.

Proof argument. Use for challenging cases with significant conflicting evidence or no direct evidence, e.g., conclusion based on FAN club research.

For Further Information

Anderson, Robert Charles. *Elements of Genealogical Analysis*. Boston, Mass.: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014.

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Giroux, Amy Larner. "Using Mind Mapping as a Visual Research Plan." Webinar, 8 October 2021. *Legacy Family Tree Webinars*. https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/using-mind-mapping-as-a-visual-research-plan/.

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

Wilson, Catherine. "Following the GPS Using TMG." *RUG of Arlington Virginia Newsletter*. 24 (September 2012): 2325-2329. PDF download. *The Roots Users Group*. http://www.rootsusers.org/ : 2023. The GPS has been updated since Catherine wrote this article, but her method will give TMG users additional ideas.

[1] Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd edition (Washington, D.C.: Board for Certification of Genealogists, 2019), 34.