

APGO

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Cite Anything

A Unified Approach to
Crafting Citations



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Citations are a necessary part of our work as genealogists, but we often stumble over questions of content and format, wishing they didn't take so much effort to produce. Some of us freeze even at the thought of writing a citation. But what if we had a way to simplify how we approach citations—using a paint-by-numbers system rather than producing art *a la* Claude Monet? What if it felt easy rather than time consuming?

Constructing a source citation involves two important activities. The first is understanding the materials we work with.¹ This means considering the entire source, not just a specific page mentioning an ancestor. Who created it and when? What did they call it? What material does it contain? Who has custody? That information becomes the content of our citation.

The second activity is determining the format or structure of the citation and filling in relevant details. When we talk about the structure of a citation, we are talking about the *sequence* of information and the *punctuation* that connects it.² Because citations

are made up of component sections placed in a specific order, understanding the content and its arrangement saves time, alleviates frustration over “proper” citation construction, and serves as a guide for identifying relevant citation elements.

The approach to citations presented here started with the goal of using one format to reference all sources. The structure should be familiar because it relies on existing concepts developed by other practitioners. My contribution distills numerous options into one approach that simplifies how to think about citation components and offers consistency across all source types.

Citation Components

No matter the source, citation content is made up of the same set of components. This is true whether we're using archival or agency records, putting the focus on the record or the publication, or citing a physical artifact instead of a written document. Once we have components identified and filled in, we can arrange them based on our preferences or those of editors.

¹ Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Documentation* (Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2017), 37–39.

² *Mastering Genealogical Documentation*, 43–46.

There are four main components, each one serving a distinct purpose. Two are essential; two others provide supporting information.

Essential Components

SOURCE

A description of the source under evaluation, independent of its location or the way it was accessed.

ACCESS METHOD

How the researcher obtained the source (e.g., a website, microfilm, or repository).

Supporting Components

WHEREABOUTS

The place where the source resides, or an intermediate format (e.g., the archive where the source is found, or microfilm roll details when scanned for digital access).

CITING

A reference in the source to another source not yet examined, or to the unverified whereabouts of a source (e.g., the “source of source”).

A Closer Look at Each Component

Source

The Source is most important because it describes the material being evaluated for evidence. It may be a published book, a record book, loose papers, a website, an artifact, or any other type of source available to us. Its content includes four subcomponents—Creator, Title, Arrangement, and Details—and follows a largest-to-smallest arrangement (general-to-specific).

CREATOR

The Creator of a source may be an individual, but in genealogical research it most often represents the institution responsible for creating a record.

When citing government records, lead with the jurisdiction linked to the agency or court, followed by the parent jurisdiction if necessary for clarification. Then provide the name of the agency or court.

When citing sources held by private institutions or individuals, record the name with location information in parentheses. Here are examples of creators:

Citation Components

No matter the source, citation content is made up of the same set of components.

- **Source.** A description of the source under evaluation, independent of its location or the way it was accessed.
- **Access Method.** How the researcher obtained the source.
- **Whereabouts.** The place where the source resides.
- **Citing.** A reference in the source to another source not yet examined, or to the unverified whereabouts of a source.

- Wayne County, New York, County Court
- Ontario, Second Heir and Devisee Commission
- Berwick-upon-Tweed Methodist Circuit (Berwick, Northumberland, Scotland)
- Oscar J. Knox (Pontotoc, Mississippi)

TITLE

The Title of a source may be its title given by the creator, a formal title created later by an archival institution, or a generic title developed through consensus or assigned by the individual researcher.

When citing published material, publication data follows the title in parentheses. Title format should follow *Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines for use of italics and quotation marks.

- Coroner Inquest Deposition Files, 1840–1925
- 1900 US census
- *The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy*³
- “Using Cluster Methodology to Backtrack an Ancestor: The Case of John Bradberry”⁴

ARRANGEMENT

The Arrangement of sources is relevant when the material is arranged by geography or a nesting of institutional subdivisions. We use this most often in census and military citations, but it is used any time records are arranged in a hierarchy.

- Derbyshire, Shardlow Registration District, Long Eaton, Enumeration District 13
- Army Air Forces, 20th Air Force, 6th Bomb Group, 40th Squadron, *White Mistress*

3 Blaine T. Bettinger, *The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy* (Cincinnati, OH: Family Tree Books, 2016).

4 William M. Litchman, “Using Cluster Methodology to Backtrack an Ancestor: The Case of John Bradberry,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 95 (June 2007): 103–116.

DETAILS

Finally, Details guide us to where the cited information is to be found within the source. This includes things like page numbers, dates, and sections within books.

This part of the citation also includes descriptive details, like the names of the people involved, the type of document (if different from the main title), and military rank. Which details are relevant depends on the source.⁵ Details should be arranged in an order that reflects arrangement—for example, page numbers come before content within the page, such as the date, parties, or other details.

- page 28, dwelling 99, family 104, James Jennings household
- page 47, number 393, Fenning Park, baptized 25 March 1827

Access Method

The Access Method describes how researchers accessed the source. It may describe any number of ways we obtained sources: websites, microfilm, library call numbers, archival collections, or even the identity of the person who mailed a copy to us. Describing how we accessed the source allows the reader to retrace our steps.

When citing access methods other than a publication (such as books and websites), present the information in smallest-to-largest order separated by commas. This arrangement is consistent with citation practices in the United States.⁶ When accessing records through a publication (an authored work), use that citation format.

GOVERNMENT

- Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, United Kingdom
- General Registry Department, George Town, Grand Cayman
- Social Security Administration, Woodlawn, Maryland

ARCHIVE

- Victoria Public Record Series (VPRS) 9288, City of Melbourne Early Building Records (1850–1915); Public Record Office Victoria, North Melbourne, Victoria
- Record Group 36, Records of the U.S. Customs Service; National Archives at Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

WEBSITE

- digital image, “Passport Applications, 1795–1905,” *Fold3* (<https://fold3.com> : accessed 29 February 2020)

MICROFILM

- Family History Library (FHL) microfilm 1784451
- Library and Archives Canada (LAC) microfilm C-7914
- National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) microfilm publication M1343, roll 6

Whereabouts

The Whereabouts explains where the source is currently located. For the most part, this means a repository.

On some occasions, it's useful to refer to a facsimile of a source, such as the microfilm, when accessing digitized images.

When recording Whereabouts, it's important to verify the current location of the source, since it serves to direct the reader to an alternate Access Method. If you accessed a source at its physical location, the Whereabouts and Access Method will be the same and should not be duplicated.

Citing

The Citing component provides “source-of-source” details, when a derivative or authored source points us to another location for its ultimate source.⁷ We use this when the source-of-source information is provided and useful for evaluation.

It is also used to reference the whereabouts of digitized sources when relying only on unverified data provided by the digital publisher.

Citation Structure

Once you're comfortable with the components, you can think about structure. Under current practices, we use the structure to communicate whether the source is published or unpublished, or whether it is being used in a discipline-specific context, such as legal format. To those new in the field, applying structure to communicate these underlying characteristics is one of the most confusing aspects of citations.

We can simplify how we think about citation structure without compromising our ability to communicate source characteristics. With that in mind, my approach prioritizes consistency and avoids changing the format based on record type or access method.

The structure utilizes the layered citation method described in *Evidence Explained* (EE) and used widely among US-based genealogists.⁸ Components are separated from the others by semicolons to clearly delineate their distinct content and purpose. However, where circumstances or preferences ask for a

5 Citation examples in *Evidence Explained* contain more than eighty unique types of citation detail. See, Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, 3rd ed. rev. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2017).

6 *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 14.240.

7 *Evidence Explained*, 343–344.

8 *Evidence Explained*, 58, 825.

nonlayered citation, you can keep components in the same order and adjust the punctuation.

Base “Universal” Structure

All sources can be cited with two essential components—Source and Access Method. While this simplicity does not always communicate everything we desire, it meets the fundamental requirements of a citation.

For published material, we generally only use one component:

Source.

For unpublished sources, we need two components at a minimum:

Source; Access Method.

Expand the format to include subcomponents:

Creator, Title, Details; Access Method.

or

Creator, Title, Arrangement, Details; Access Method.

This structure is the “authored work” or “agency” format described at length in chapters five (cemeteries), seven (churches), and eight (local government) in *Evidence Explained*.⁹ In other chapters, *EE* describes additional formats and options. In my approach, those variations matter little because the source we’re considering is consistently described at the front of the citation. The two-component structure serves as the foundation for all sources, no matter their origin or current location.

Expanded Structures

To make the format infinitely flexible, we may add supporting components. Using the Whereabouts and Citing components as additional layers can communicate information about the source’s origin or other formats. The four components are always arranged in the following order:

Source; Whereabouts; Access Method; Citing.

You will rarely need both supporting components in the same citation, typically resulting in one of the following formats.

Source; Whereabouts; Access Method.

Source; Access Method; Citing.

Examples

The following models are meant to demonstrate general approaches to common source types. I am concerned with the big picture arrangement of citation components, leaving the practitioner to make decisions concerning things like repetition, abbreviations, and punctuation.

Local Government

Local government records are one of the most ubiquitous sources in genealogy. The following examples demonstrate structures for three different source types and access methods.

We’ll begin with a straightforward citation to a county birth record accessed on microfilm.

Eureka County, Nevada, Recorder, Birth Record 1, p. 110, affidavit of birth, boy born to wife of Abraham Laird on 25 July 1902, recorded 1 June 1905; FHL Microfilm 5188309.

Here we cite a probate register with an online Access Method and the optional Whereabouts at the county courthouse.

Mills County, Iowa, Circuit Court, Calendar of Probate Matters [1878–1889], estate 327, Ira Quackenbush, will probated 20 May 1881; Mills County Courthouse, Glenwood, Iowa; digital image, “Iowa, Wills and Probate Records, 1758–1997,” *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 29 February 2020).

In this example, the source was obtained from the court that created it. The name of the court is normally included in the Creator component, but it can be omitted there if duplicated in the Access Method. Because the Whereabouts and Access Method are the same, they are represented in one layer.

Burke County, Georgia, Deed Book 9½, pp. 224–225, John Jones to Thomas Sorsbey, 20 December 1842; Clerk of Superior Court, Waynesboro, Georgia.¹⁰

Source Copy in Private Hands

This citation to a Japanese family register demonstrates the worldwide application of the format and the specific approach when citing an individual’s copy of a government source. The

⁹ *Evidence Explained*, 207–234, 308–418.

¹⁰ For comparison, see *Evidence Explained*, 459–460.

koseki is the Source; the government office is the Whereabouts; and the individual who provided a copy is the Access Method.

Shingu Town, Hyogo Prefecture, Koseki [Family Register], Book 7, folios 78–81, Nishikurisu, Kami-azahara 980, ASO Shinji household; Government Office, Tatsuno City, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan; copy in possession of [name and address withheld for privacy], Tatsuno, Hyogo, Japan.

Census

Census enumerations are great for demonstrating the choice to omit certain information from a citation. Because of their ubiquitous use, genealogists omit Creator details from census citations and choose commonly used generic titles. We also make decisions about whether to use the Whereabouts component, which can be an archival reference or microfilm.

This example refers to microfilm as the Whereabouts.

1911 Census of Canada, Ontario, District 88 (West Lambton), population schedule, Subdistrict 59, Enumeration District 1, Walpole Island Reserve, p. 11, dwelling 105, family 123, Nancy Greenbird household; Library and Archives Canada (LAC) microfilm T-20381; digital image, "1911 Census of Canada," *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.ca> : accessed 29 February 2020).¹¹

This example includes the archival reference as the Whereabouts.

1901 Census of England and Wales, Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, Enumeration District 15, fol. 133, p. 7, no. 34, Alfred S. H. Reynolds household; PRO RG13/2461, National Archives, Kew; digital image, "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 29 February 2020).¹²

This example does not use the Whereabouts component.

1900 U.S. census, Alabama, Cherokee County, population schedule, Precinct 7, Coloma, Enumeration District 122, sheet 6A, dwelling 101, family 104, Benjamin F. Savage household; digital image, "1900 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 29 February 2020).

Archived Private Source

When citing material obtained directly from an archive, the Source; Access Method structure is used. Source information is arranged in largest-to-smallest order, while the Access Method contains archival location information and is arranged in smallest-to-largest order.

Here we need to discuss the use of semicolons for different purposes. The overall approach uses semicolons to separate component sections, which we call *layers*. However, when citing archival material, we often need to incorporate semicolons to distinguish between levels of arrangement—series, collections, record groups, and so on.¹³ In those cases, we divide the Access Method information into its levels using additional semicolons.

The following example cites an architectural model in a university archive.

Model of Equitable Building, 1965; Box 1; Series 1, Equitable Building Architectural Drawings and Model, 1890–1924 and 1965; MSS 294, Trust Company of Georgia Collection, 1778–1965; Stuart A. Rose Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

We can create a more streamlined version by reducing the amount of information in the citation. In the following example, series and collection titles are omitted from the Access Method, but the institutional Creator is included in the Source component. No semicolons are needed within the Access Method because the details are so brief. However, reducing information means limiting the reader's ability to assess the source's evidentiary characteristics.

Trust Company of Georgia, Model of Equitable Building, 1965; Box 1, Series 1, MSS 294, Stuart A. Rose Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

Archived Government Source

We utilize many sources created by governments and preserved in archives. Here are two examples of the same compiled military service record. The first includes the Creator at the front of the citation, not just referenced in the Access Method's archival information.

U.S., War Department, Adjutant General, Civil War, Compiled Military Service Record, Utah, Cavalry, Smith's Company, Benjamin Neff, private; Carded Records Showing Military Service of Soldiers Who

¹¹ For comparison, see *Evidence Explained*, 301.

¹² For comparison, see *Evidence Explained*, 302.

¹³ *Evidence Explained*, 122.

Fought in Volunteer Organizations During the American Civil War, 1890–1912; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1762–1984, Record Group 94; National Archives, Washington, DC.¹⁴

This method leaves us with duplicate information and a long citation. Omitting the Creator and summarizing the series title provides a more streamlined version that still follows the recommended structure. This demonstrates how the approach is designed to be flexible and not veer dramatically from existing citation practices.

Civil War Compiled Military Service Record, Utah, Cavalry, Smith's Company, Benjamin Neff, private; Carded Records, Volunteer Organizations, Civil War; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1762–1984, Record Group 94; National Archives, Washington, DC.

Religious Records

For sources created by individuals or private institutions, the Creator is formatted with the name followed by the location in parentheses.

Mount Holly Preparative Meeting of Friends [Quakers] (Burlington County, New Jersey), Minutes, 1816–1850, unpaginated, “7th Mo. 30th” [30 July] 1835, complaint of Wm. F. Garnee against Daniel Wills; digital image, “U.S., Quaker Meeting Records, 1681–1935,” *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 29 February 2020).

Here the citation is expanded by adding the Citing component at the end. The archival details in the Citing component could be moved to the Whereabouts position upon verification.

Mount Holly Preparative Meeting of Friends [Quakers] (Burlington County, New Jersey), Minutes, 1816–1850, unpaginated, “7th Mo. 30th” [30 July] 1835, complaint of Wm. F. Garnee against Daniel Wills; digital image, “U.S., Quaker Meeting Records, 1681–1935,” *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 29 February 2020); citing call number RG2/PH/M65 1.1, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Minutes, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

Publications

By following the broad format of authored works, my approach is largely consistent with existing publication citation formats. For example, a basic book citation will begin with the Creator (the author), followed by the Title with publication data in parentheses, and ending with Detail (the page number).

Publication citations traditionally do not include call numbers, but the Access Method may be used to incorporate such location detail. The same layer also describes websites hosting digitized copies of books.

John Grenham, *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors*, 5th ed. (Dublin: Gill Books, 2019), 105, Brewers; FHL book 941.5 D27gj 2019.

For websites, the pages, sections, and site name all fall within the Title section of the citation.

“Bloss Family Cemetery,” *Find A Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 29 February 2020), Blossvale, Oneida County, New York, cemetery 2151586.

Other Structures

There are many other citation structures to consider. Some are recommended by specific archives; others may be the house styles used by journals. They may reflect the preferences of genealogists developed in different countries. Even though we may use one preferred structure day to day, we should be comfortable transitioning to other formats as needed. Three situations are important for this discussion.

Publication Focus

A common structure to consider is one based on the principle that source images are often presented as published material.¹⁵ In the digital world, websites providing access to digital images are a publication. Microfilm is also divided into *published* and *preservation* classifications.¹⁶ If the *publication* is considered the source—rather than an historical document—its information comes first (Creator, Title, etc.) and a description of the historical source becomes the Detail.

Multiple options for the treatment of publications in citations—with their advantages and disadvantages—are described in detail in Jones's *Mastering Genealogical Documentation* (MGD).¹⁷ In the following example, he offers a URL-based citation (option

¹⁴ For comparison, see *Evidence Explained*, 593–595.

¹⁵ *Evidence Explained*, 127.

¹⁶ *Evidence Explained*, 129–131.

¹⁷ *Mastering Genealogical Documentation*, 114–121.

4), presenting the website as the lead component with source information in a secondary position.

"New York Probate Records, 1629–1971,"
FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-99HY-1RW?i=425&cc=1920234> : accessed 20 February 2017), Cayuga Co., N.Y., estate papers box 4, Raymond Greenfield, will, 10 October 1821.¹⁸

Citations of publication microfilm treat images similar to an article in an anthology. For example, this citation from *Evidence Explained*:

Registers of Vessels Arriving at the Port of New York from Foreign Ports, 1789–1919, microfilm publication M1066 (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1980), roll 27, alphabetical by ship; SS *Königin Luise*, 23 June 1905, for Rosaria Furia, p. 58 [*sic*, 68], line 2.¹⁹

Under my approach, the ship list Source would appear first, followed by the microfilm details as the Access Method. Here, I've made the choice to reduce the microfilm reference to the publication and roll numbers, but you could use the expanded publication details above too.

U.S., Customs Service, passenger manifest, New York arrivals, SS *Königin Luise*, arrived 23 June 1905, p. 68, line 2, Rosaria Furia; National Archives microfilm publication M1066, roll 27.

When working with imaged copies, the variations between publication microfilm, preservation microfilm, or online access are distinctions without a difference. Yes, there are differences in the method of creation, amount of descriptive detail, and breadth of distribution. However, evaluation of the source—rather than its distribution method—is our priority.

That is why I prioritize the historical source under consideration rather than the publication used for distribution. A source focus rather than publication focus means readers don't have to read as far into a citation to begin understanding its content.

Publication Focus

FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org> : accessed 18 January 2020) . . .

Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 10 September 2018) . . .

FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org> : accessed 31 July 2019) . . .

vs. Source Focus

Orleans Parish, Louisiana, Parish Court, Minutes, 1808–1817...

Nuestra Señora del Rosario (Junín, Mendoza, Argentina) . . .

Scotland, General Registrar, General Index to Births . . .

The *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* (NGSQ) takes a publication focused approach to many citations, though not all. Material we otherwise find in the Access Method component is presented at the front of the citation, while the Creator, Title, and Detail components are moved to the second half. Also note the lack of a semicolon separator between the essential components in the example below.

FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/film/008343021>), digital film 008343021, image 470, Carroll Co., Ark., Tax Records, 1844, Isaac Hobbs, unpaginated.²⁰

If you move the website reference to the end of the citation, the resulting structure fits my approach.

Carroll Co., Ark., Tax Records, 1844, Isaac Hobbs, unpaginated, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/film/008343021>), digital film 008343021, image 470.

Of course, there are exceptions within NGSQ, as seen in this example of a digitized deed that fits the structure described in this article.

Prince George's Co., [Md.] County Court, Land Records, 1743–1746, Liber BB 1: 240–41, Marlow et ux. to Foard, 17 November 1744, recorded 3 December 1744; digital images, Maryland State Archives, MDLANDREC (<https://mdlandrec.net/main>).²¹

¹⁸ *Mastering Genealogical Documentation*, 118.

¹⁹ *Evidence Explained*, 573.

²⁰ Melinda Daffin Henningfield, "A Family for Mary (Jones) Hobbs Clark of Carroll County, Arkansas," *NGSQ* 107 (March 2019): 5.

²¹ Michael Hait, "Untangling Two Edward Marlows in Colonial Southern Maryland," *NGSQ* 107 (June 2019): 102.

General Audience vs. Discipline-Specific

Discipline-specific citations—especially for legal and government works—generally serve the purpose of finding sources. However, shorthand references do not provide contextual information or details the lay reader needs to interpret source contents.

For example, a legal-style citation for US statutes would appear as follows: 2 Stat. 139, chap. 13 (30 March 1802).²² I follow *EE* guidance “to construct citations . . . usable by all readers, regardless of their training and experience.”²³

Short Notes and Source Lists

Reference notes (footnotes) are the most complete and complex of the styles used in genealogy, but we also use shortened notes and source lists (bibliographies). My approach provides a consistent foundation from which to create these other references. Shortened notes, preferred over *ibid.* and *op. cit.*, generally draw from the Creator, Title, and Detail components of the citation. Follow *EE* guidance concerning content choices.²⁴

Reference lists draw primarily from the Creator and Title components and may be arranged any number of ways (but my format is already arranged by Creator). You might also utilize Access Method or Whereabouts layers to arrange notes by repository or publisher. Elements are separated by periods rather than commas. Again, *EE* provides significant guidance in this area.²⁵

Additional Considerations

There are some additional considerations for crafting citations with this approach.

Order and Content

This citation structure is inflexible concerning the order of information but flexible concerning which information to include. It makes no apologies for the length of citations but allows the researcher to reduce them as needed.²⁶ Strategies for reducing the length of a citation can be found in *MGD*.²⁷

Templates and Computer Software

This format offers a single template for use in genealogical software. Users still need to understand the sources they cite, but a consistent format removes a major point of confusion when writing citations.

Formats for commonly used Whereabouts and Access Method details can be stored and attached to Source information

This citation structure is inflexible concerning the order of information but flexible concerning which information to include.

for faster citation construction. One master template can be used to create any citation. A single predictable structure offers consistency for data transfer between systems.

Standards Compliant

This structure meets citation standards set by the Board for Certification of Genealogists as described in *Genealogy Standards*.²⁸ It answers the questions who, what, when, and wherein, and more. It conforms to principles and models detailed in *Evidence Explained*, as the standards ask. Even where it veers somewhat from *EE*'s preferred models, the structure still relies on choices described in the book. When using this approach in my last credential renewal, no judge commented on the citations.

Simplifying Citations

No matter the practitioner's experience, skill level, and purpose, a consistent structure simplifies the process of writing citations. It alleviates the need for format-based decisions so we can focus on what matters most—the information. In that area, this method offers guidance concerning the data needed in each citation, providing a template useful for standardization and faster citation creation.



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²² *Evidence Explained*, 747.

²³ *Evidence Explained*, 740.

²⁴ *Evidence Explained*, 64–66.

²⁵ *Evidence Explained*, 67–71.

²⁶ You'll find no apology for citation length in *EE* either. See *Evidence Explained*, 45.

²⁷ *Mastering Genealogical Documentation*, 27–30.

²⁸ Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Ancestry, 2019), 5–9, Standards 5–6.