



ICAPGenSM
The International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists

Where's the Proof? Organizing and Writing Genealogical Findings

By Lisa Stokes, AG®

Session 599830

My favorite resource: *Mastering Genealogical Proof* by Thomas W. Jones. A study group called GenProof has been organized using this book as the framework.

See <https://www.genproofstudygroups.com> for more details.

Part 1: Analyzing and Correlating Your Research

What is a written genealogy proof?

Written Genealogy Proof:

A section of a research report documenting research findings about an event, fact or relationship. A proof uses analysis and correlation to make and support a solid conclusion.

Written genealogy proof is not:

A fun family narrative telling the story of a family, usually in chronological order

A research travel log detailing the process of the research

A basic list of sources found

Types of Genealogy Proofs:

Proof Statement: Simple, with strong direct evidence and no conflicts (usually 1-2 simple paragraphs)

Proof Summary: Needs more analysis to prove and resolve conflicts (usually 1-4 more involved paragraphs)

Proof Argument: Very involved, with many layers of evidence (usually several paragraphs to several pages)

Analysis: Analyzing a source, its information, and the evidence means to answer questions about reliability, such as who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Examples: Who created the record? What type of source is it? Original, derivative or authored? When was the record created? Near the time of the event or years later? Where was the record created? Who was the informant and how reliable were they? Etc.

1. Understand the terminology:

SOURCES: (Documents, books, artifacts or people)

- **Original:** First creation of a source; usually the most reliable type of source
- **Derivative:** Subsequent copy of an original; transcribed copy, index, abstract, etc.
- **Authored:** Compiled by an author or researcher

INFORMATION: (Knowledge of dates, places, names, etc.)

- **Primary:** Informant had first-hand knowledge of the event or relationship
- **Secondary:** Informant had second-hand knowledge of the event or relationship
- **Undetermined:** Researcher is unable to determine whether primary or secondary

EVIDENCE: (Relevance of information to answer the question)

- **Direct:** Evidence supported with a direct statement that answers a question
- **Indirect:** Two or more pieces of information that do not directly answer the question, but when combined give ideas and information that lead to an answer.
- **Negative:** Missing information or evidence that leads to an answer to the question. Negative evidence must be layered with other evidence in order to be proven true.

Resources for learning about genealogical terminology:

Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained*

“The Evidence Analysis Process Map” found in preface

Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*

Chapter 2: “Concepts Fundamental to the GPS”

BCG, *Genealogy Standards* (see glossary)

Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor, *Professional Genealogy*

Chapter 12: “Reasoning from Evidence” by Thomas W. Jones

2. Gather and catalog each source in a research log

- Type of log doesn’t matter, just find what works for you
- Record each source
- Gather every clue and detail
- Include a full source citation
- Include analysis and correlation

Research log resources:

- Diana Elder, [Research Logs](#) at the ICAPGen YouTube Channel
- Diana Elder, *Research Like a Pro*
Chapter 6 “Research Logs”

3. Cull each source for important clues:

Dig deep to find every clue by abstracting the details and transcribing documents as needed.

Mindy Taylor: [Extraction, Transcription and Abstraction](#) at the ICAPGen YouTube Channel

4. Correlate the sources, information and evidence

Correlation: Means to compare the information and evidence found in each source to determine its relevance and accuracy.

Tools: Research logs, spreadsheets, charts, lists, mind maps, etc.

Lucidspark: <https://lucidspark.com/> (signup for a free account and develop a chart for free)

Correlation resources:

- Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*
Chapter 5 “Analysis and Correlation”
- Lisa Stokes: [Presenting Analysis and Correlation in an ICAPGen Level 1 Report](#) at the ICAPGen YouTube Channel

5. Make an evidence analysis chart

- For researcher’s own reference and doesn’t need to be perfect
- Helps brainstorming ideas
- Great learning experience
- Helps researcher think through the analysis
- Not all ideas will be included in the final report

Detailed List Evaluating Sources for Birth Proof for Suzy Smithson

1850 Census of Forsyth Co, GA; household of Jim Smithson		
Source	Information	Evidence
1850 Census; Derivative source; Copy made by enumerator himself so it is somewhat reliable; Copy is clear.	Suzy Smithson's birth in Georgia about 1835; Primary information; Informant was likely Jim or Sally Smithson, who were first-hand witnesses of Suzy's birth; This record was created closest to actual birth event.	Source directly states that Suzy was born about 1835 in Georgia; The family resided in Forsyth County, Georgia, indirectly inferring a possible birthplace of Forsyth Co.
1859 Forsyth Co, GA Marriage Register for Hector Snodgrass and Suzy Smithson		
1859 Marriage Register; Original source (handwriting and instruments used vary throughout the page indicating a possible original document); Copy is clear.	Suzy was listed as age 24 with a calculated birth year of 1835 ; Informant is undetermined; Informant was likely Suzy or her parent; Witness was William Smithson.	Source directly states that Suzy was 24 and therefore born about 1835; Marriage took place in Forsyth County, Georgia, indirectly inferring a plausible birth in Forsyth Co.

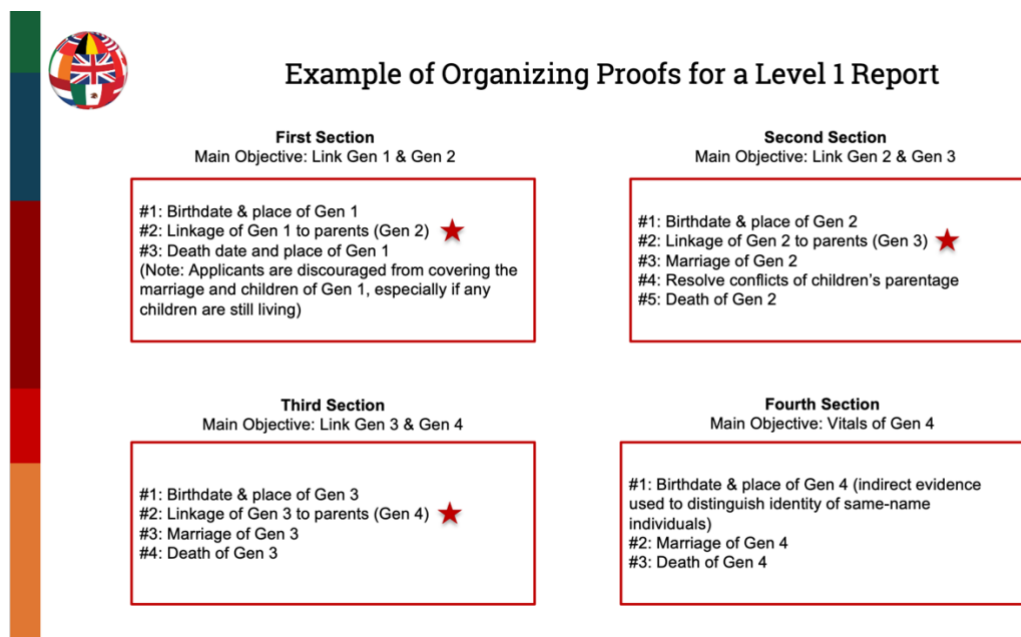
Part 2: Organizing Your Research

1. Review the Objective

Example of proof objectives for one section of an ICAPGen Level 1 report:

- Prove the birthplace and birthdate of John Jones
- ★ • Prove the parentage of John Jones
- Prove the marriage place and date of John Jones and Mary Smith
- Prove the death date and place of John Jones

The linkage connections between the generations are the most important proofs for an ICAPGen Level 1 Report.



*This is an example of just one way to organize the proofs. Please remember that the evidence is different in every single research project, so do not take this outline and try to make it fit your research exactly. Organize your proofs according to the evidence in your project. The generational linkage, or the proofs with the red stars are the "must have" proofs to meet the Level 1 requirements.

Resources for setting an objective:

- Diana Elder, *Research Like a Pro*
Chapter 1 "Research Objectives"

2. Make a list of the sources for each proof

- List the sources for each proof
- Include the pertinent information
- Eliminate irrelevant sources & information (focus only on information in a source that pertains to the objective)
- One source may be used in multiple objectives
- Organize in the order of importance



Basic Lists for Suzy Smithson

Birth Proof

- **1850 Census** (born about 1835 in Georgia)
- **1859 Marriage Record** (age 24— born about 1835; married in Georgia)
- **1860 Census** in hubby's household (born about 1836 in Georgia)
- **1931 Death Record** for son James Snodgrass (Suzy born in Forsyth Co, Georgia)
- **1901 Obituary for Suzy (Smithson) Snodgrass** (age 69, born on 2 May 1832 in Forsyth Co, Georgia)

Parentage Proof

- **1850 Census** (in household of Jim & Sally Smithson)
- **1859 Marriage Record** (maiden name & married name)
- **1869 Marriage Record** for brother, Isaac Smithson (took place at Suzy & Hector Snodgrass's home)
- **1860 Census** for Jim Smithson household (lists brothers Isaac & William) with parents
- **1880 Census** (brothers, Isaac & William living with parents)

3. Evaluate the sources, information and evidence:

Answer questions such as:

- Which source is most compelling and why?
- How reliable is each source? (Discuss any issues of concern)
- Who was the informant and how reliable were they?
- What convincing evidence proves that these records pertain to the correct individual?
- Do the sources, information and evidence correlate? (Describe in detail)
- Is the compiled and correlated evidence strong and compelling?
- Are there any conflicts that need resolved?

Making notes to evaluate the sources, information, and evidence in the research log is helpful preparation for report writing.



Objective: Parentage of Suzy Smithson

1850 US Census in Forsyth County, Georgia: Suzy Smithson listed in household with Jim and Sally Smithson (age 15, birth 1835 in Georgia, helps establish correct individual).

Indirect evidence; No relationship stated, but they were listed together

1859 Marriage Register (to Hector Snodgrass) in Forsyth County: Lists Suzy's maiden name as "Smithson," witness was Suzy's brother, William Smithson.

Indirect evidence; Maiden name listed, brother William was witness; Events took place in same county

1869 Marriage Record for Isaac Smithson: Isaac Smithson was married at Hector & Suzy Snodgrass' home.

Indirect evidence; Links Suzy Snodgrass to Isaac Smithson

1860 US Census in Forsyth County, Georgia: Does not list Suzy in the household with parents, but does list brothers Isaac and William with Jim and Suzy Smithson.

Indirect evidence; Links Isaac & William to the family

1880 US Census in Forsyth County Georgia: Isaac & William were both living with Jim and Sally Smithson (both stated as "son" to the head of household).

Writing on census is difficult to read; Directly links Isaac and William to the family.

Analysis resources:

- Diana Elder, *Research Like a Pro*
Chapter 2 “Analyze Your Sources”
- Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*
Chapter 5 “Analysis and Correlation”
- Lisa Stokes: [Presenting Analysis and Correlation in an ICAPGen Level 1 Report](#) at the ICAPGen YouTube Channel

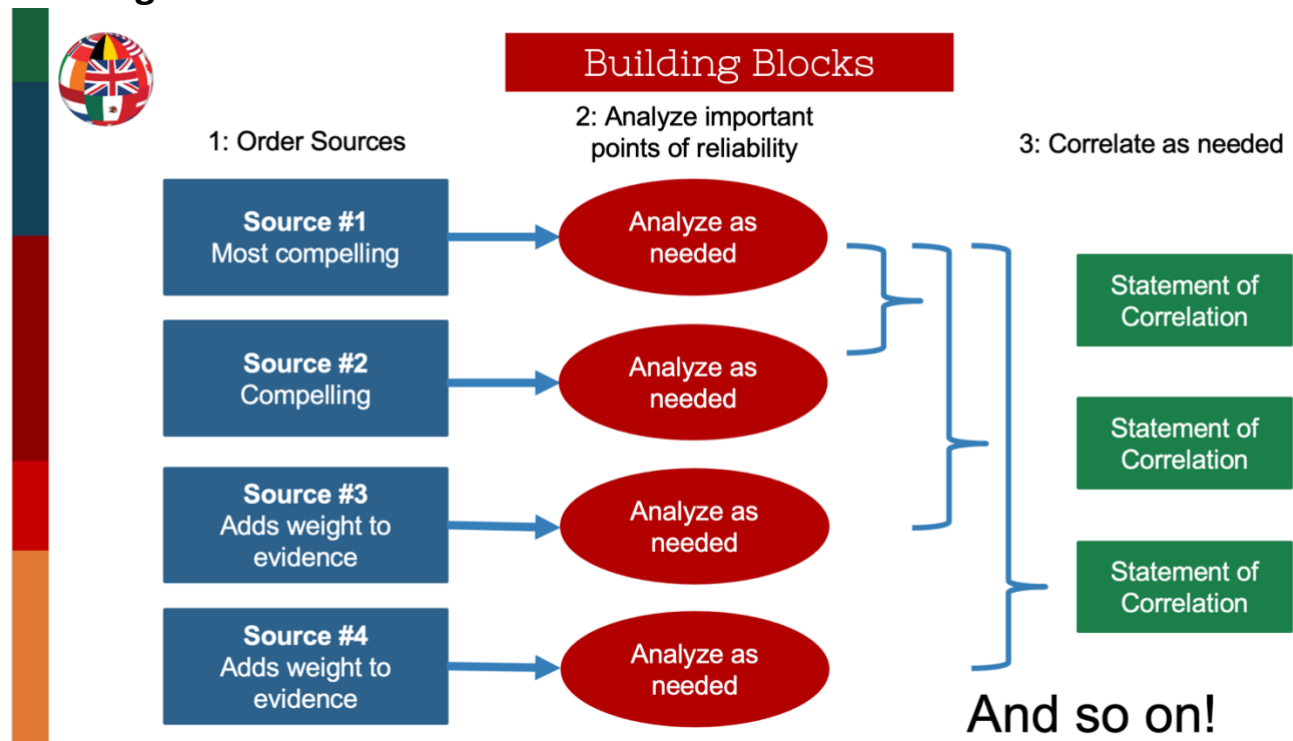
4. Revisit the research to fill in the gaps

- Which evidence is weak and needs more proof?
- Are there holes in the logic?
- Is there sufficient correlation?
- What additional source may add more weight to the conclusion?
- What additional sources may give clues to resolve any conflicts found?

5. Plan for Writing (Techniques and Tools)

Techniques

Building Blocks:



Syllogism: If-then statement that shows the sequence of logic



Syllogism

If point A is true **and** if point B is true, **then** point C is true as well.

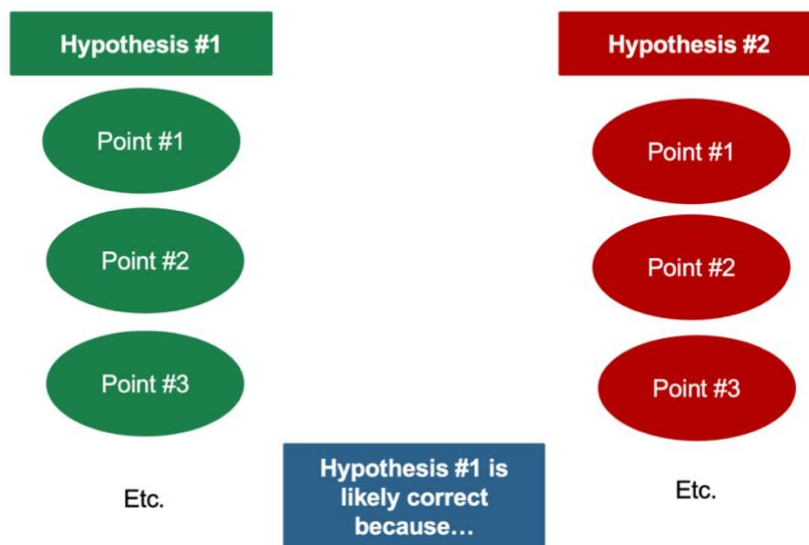


Example: *If Suzy is the full sister of Isaac & William Smithson, and Isaac and William are the sons of Jim and Sally Smithson, then Suzy is also the daughter of Jim and Sally Smithson.*

Multiple Hypotheses: Works well when writing a report to sort out multiple people of the same name or when the conclusion is not yet clear. It is also helpful when conveying research findings to a client when more research is still needed.

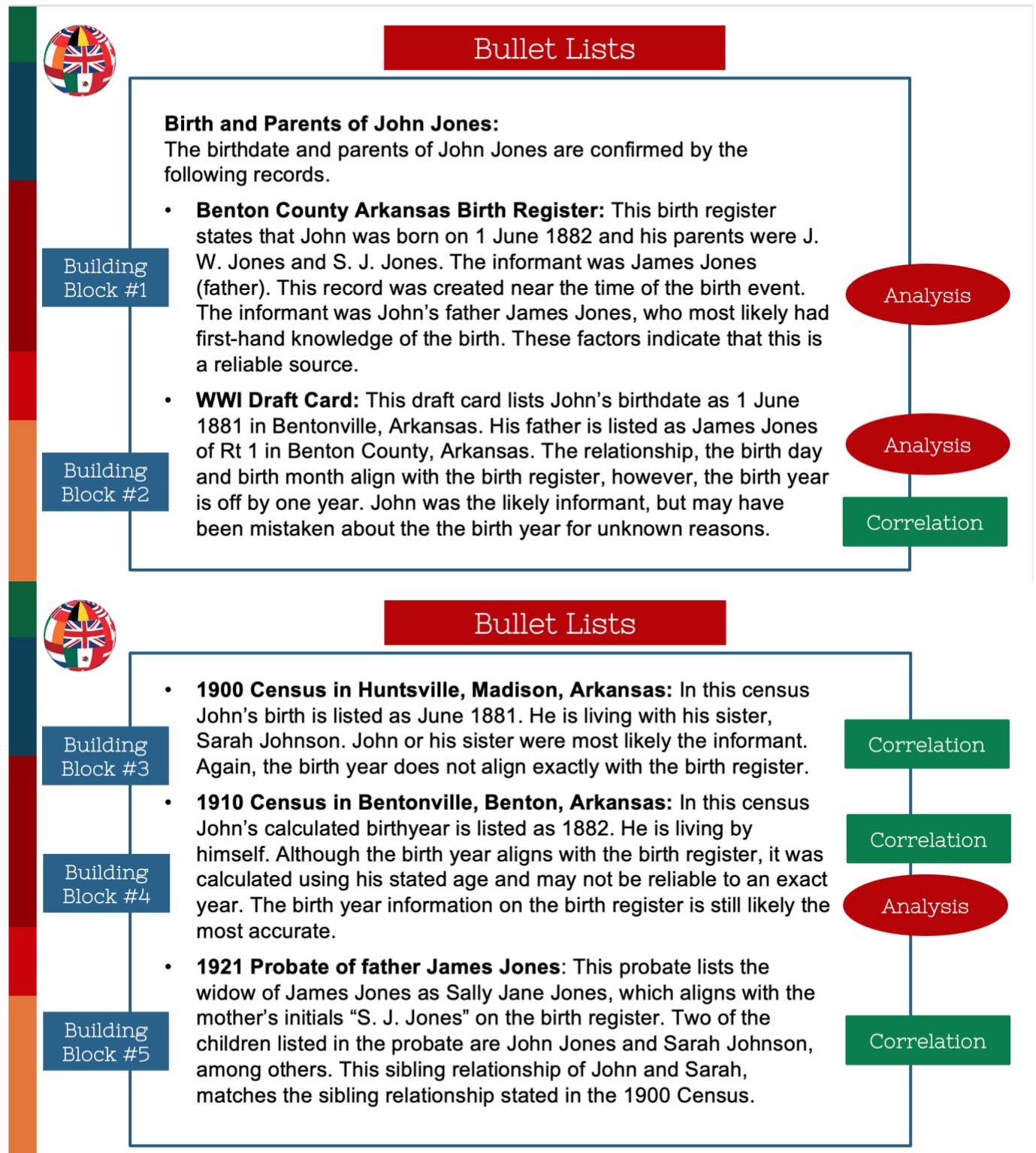


Multiple Hypotheses



Tools

Bullet Lists:



Note: For presentation purposes, this example is only showing parts of the proof. See an example of a full written proof at the end of the syllabus.

Timelines & Charts:



Differentiating individuals with the same name

Timeline/
Chart

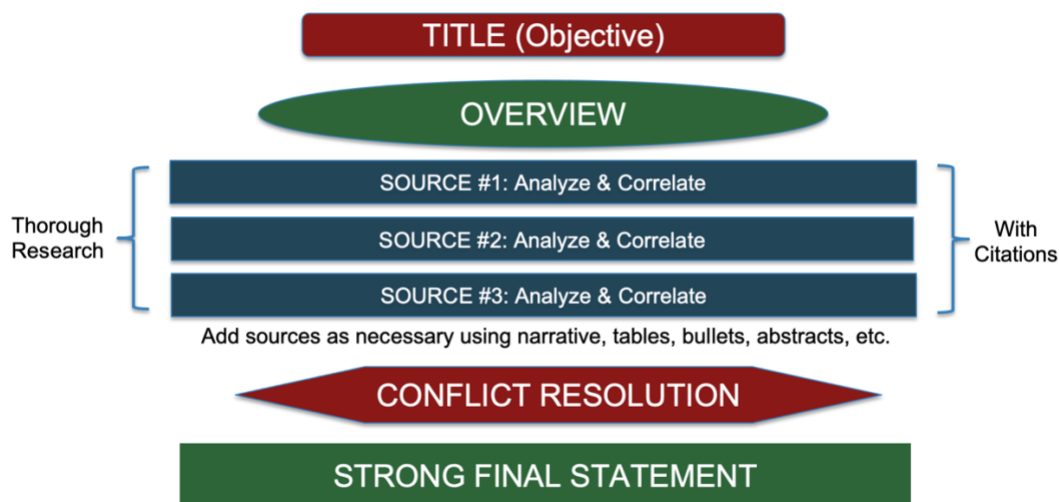
Source	Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Family	Occupation
1850 Census in Lincoln Co, KY	William Jones	1835	Kentucky	Robert & Susan Jones (possible parents)	None
1850 Census in Lincoln Co, KY	William Jones	1835	Kentucky	Geo & Mary Jones (possible parents)	None
1860 Census in Lincoln Co, KY	Wm Jones	1836	Kentucky	Christina Jones (possible wife)	Farmer
1860 Census in Lincoln Co, KY	William Jones	1835	Kentucky	N/A	Blacksmith
1865 Marriage Record in Lincoln Co	William Jones	N/A	N/A	Wife: Sarah Brown	None
1870 Census in Lincoln Co, KY	Wm Jones	1835	Kentucky	Inferred wife: Sarah Jones	Blacksmith
1870 Census in Lincoln Co, KY	William Jones	1836	Kentucky	Inferred wife: Christina Jones	Farmer

Resources for writing tools and techniques:

- Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*
Chapter 6 “Resolving Conflicts and Assembling Proof”
- Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*
Chapter 7 “The Written Conclusion”

Part 3: Composing a Written Proof

Model for a Well-Written Proof



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A downloadable version of this model can be found with the syllabus material

Principles, Techniques and Concepts:

- **Use transitions to help the proof flow smoothly.**

Example: *Clues from Michal Wegner's marriage records and Michal's death record prove that Michal only had two wives and not three, as suggested by the family group sheet. The following points prove this conclusion:*

- **Use statements of information to convey the information found in a source.** In general, keep the citation information and source details, such as the repository, page numbers, book numbers, etc. in the footnote citation. Include this information in the body of the report, only if necessary, to strengthen the proof.

Example: *The 1859 Forsyth County, Georgia marriage record for Hector Snodgrass and Suzy Smithson states that they were married on 26 September 1859.*

- **Use statements of identity confirmation as needed.** If the identity of the subject is clear, these statements are not necessary.

Statement of Identity Confirmation:

A reasoning statement that indicates the record being discussed pertains to the correct individual.

Example of Statement of Identity Confirmation:

Suzy Smithson is listed in the household of Jim and Sally Smithson in the 1850 Census, which states that she was born about 1835 in Georgia. This birth information aligns with Suzy Snodgrass' birth information in the 1860 and 1870 census records. Additionally, Suzy Smithson married Hector Snodgrass in 1869. These records work together to indicate that Suzy Smithson and Suzy Snodgrass were very likely the same person.

- **Analyze the sources, information, and evidence and discuss the reliability of each.**
- **Develop conclusions.** The goal of each proof is to work toward a solid, well-developed conclusion as the research and evidence are presented.
- **Use points of logic.** These are stated ideas that lead to and solidify a strong conclusion.
- **Correlate to layer proof.** Correlate and layer sufficient sources, information, and evidence to develop a strong and accurate conclusion in the proof. Usually, one piece of evidence by itself is insufficient to prove a life event or relationship. But when it is layered and correlated with other evidence, it can build a stronger and more accurate proof.

Example of discussing reliability, using points of logic, layering evidence, and developing a conclusion:

The 1875 Union County, Kentucky marriage record for "Wm Williams Casey" states that William, age 23, was born in Forsyth County, Georgia. His calculated birth year is 1852. William likely gave

this information to the clerk himself and therefore it is deemed reliable. Additionally, the marriage record states: "Birthplace of Groom's Mother—Donenega Co Georgia." Dahlonega, Lumpkin, Georgia neighbors Forsyth County, Georgia. Additionally, a birthplace of Georgia in 1852, lines up with the birthplace and calculated birthyear of 1852 on the 1870 and 1880 census records. This information, along with the 1850 census listing, Andrew and Anna Casey in Forsyth County, Georgia two years before William's birth, adds weight to the evidence that William was born in Forsyth County, Georgia about 1852.

- **Resolve conflicts.**

- 1) State the conflict
- 2) Give possible explanations as to why the conflict exists
- 3) Resolve the situation with analysis and correlation
- 4) If there is insufficient information and evidence for a resolution, state as unresolved and recommend further research.

Example: *There are conflicts in the names for Anna Casey on her marriage record to Abe Merryman. First, Anna used the name Nannie instead of Anna on the marriage record and on several other records. Nannie is a very common nickname for Anna, explaining this usage. It is unknown why the name "Naomi" was listed on the return portion of the marriage record, other than Naomi sounds similar to "Nannie" and the clerk may have misunderstood or made a transcription error.*

- **Make a strong final statement.** This reminds the reader of the conclusion in simple terms. This is not the place to bring in new information, sources, or evidence.

Example: *All evidence found in census records, marriage records and tax records corroborates the claim that Isaac M. Casey was most likely the son of Andrew J. Casey and Anna Butler.*

- **Use qualifiers.** Qualifiers show the level of confidence the researcher has for the conclusion being made. Few genealogical conclusions can be found to be 100% accurate, therefore use qualifiers as needed.

Examples of qualifiers: Most certainly, surely, confidently, certainly, very likely, likely, probably, possibly, plausibly, unlikely, etc.

Example: *All documents listed support the hypothesis that Wilsey Gill was probably born about 1779, possibly in Fauquier County, Virginia. However, a conclusive statement cannot be made without further evidence.*

Example of a full written proof:

How many times was Michal Wegner married? (Title or Objective)

A note in the margin of a family group sheet found amongst the client's papers states that Michal Wegner was married three times and had three different sets of children. However, only two marriage records were found for Michal: 1) his marriage to Krystyna Prellwitz on 21 June 1886 in Kolo, Kolo,

Poznań, Poland and 2) his marriage to Helena Kruger on 25 August 1899 in Kolo, Kolo, Poznań, Poland.
(Overview of conflict)

Both of these sources are digital images of the original marriage records and are deemed very reliable because they were created at the time of the event. The primary information about the marriages is detailed and appears to be accurate. (Analysis of the sources and information)

Clues from Michal's marriage records and Michal's death record prove that Michal only had two wives and not three, as suggested by the family group sheet. The following points prove this conclusion.
(Transition)

(Bullet list with points of Logic)

- Michal's marriage record to Krystyna Prellwitz, does not mention that Michal was a widower from a previous marriage. (Negative Evidence)
- Michal was only 20-years-old when he married Krystyna, therefore it is logical to believe this was Michal's first marriage. (Point of Logic with Statement of Information)
- In Michal's marriage record to Helena Kruger it states that "he [Michal] is a widower after the death of Krystyna, maiden name Prellwitz." (Use of extract with Point of Logic) This shows that Michal did not marry anyone after the death of Krystyna and before the marriage of Helena. (Statement of Explanation)
- Furthermore, in Michal's death record, it states that Michal "left his widow Helena maiden name Kruger." (Use of extract that explains a Point of Logic)
- If Helena was still living when Michal died and she was still Michal's wife at the time of his death, then Michal could not have married a third time. (Syllogism that states the Conflict Resolution)

Examination of these three documents prove Michal most likely had only two wives: Krystyna Prellwitz and Helena Schwarz. (Strong Final Statement)

Resources for composing a written proof:

- Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*
Chapter 6 "Resolving Conflicts and Assembling Proof"
- Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*
Chapter 7 "The Written Conclusion"
- Diana Elder, *Research Like a Pro*
Chapter 7 "Report Writing"
- Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor, *Professional Genealogy*
Chapter 18: "Research Reports" by Nancy A. Peters
- Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor, *Professional Genealogy*
Chapter 20: "Proof Arguments & Case Studies" by Thomas W. Jones
- Diana Elder: [Writing an Effective Research Report](#) at the ICAPGen YouTube Channel

- Lisa Stokes: [Model for a Well-Written Genealogy Proof](#) at the ICAPGen YouTube Channel
- Yoast Blog Post: [Transition words: why and how to use them](#)

RESOURCE LIST:

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