

# How to a Wring a Record Dry

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## Records, Records, Records

As genealogists, we rely on records of all types. We read, review, analyze, re-read, re-analyze, and still may miss valuable clues to help unlock mysteries and brick walls. By following basic genealogical procedures, a foundation can be established when working with various documents.

## Classify Each Record Category

- Vital records; e.g., birth, death, marriage
- Wills, estate records
- Census records
- Land records
- Immigration and naturalization records
- Family memorabilia
- Maps
- Newspaper articles
- Tax Records
- Fraternal organizations
- Business Records
- Court Records
- Voting Records
- Criminal Records

## Document Attributes

- How was the document created?
- Handwritten or typed?
- A pre-printed form?
- What language; e.g., original or translated?
- Is there additional information in the margins?
- Is this the original document or a copy?
- Are there unique markings or seals?

## Compiled Records

- May not be complete
- May not be transcribed accurately
- May not tell the whole story

## Who created the document?

- Census taker
- Clergy
- Medical professional
- Government official
- Administrative clerk

## What do you know about the document's creator?

- Was the creator related to other persons cited on the document?
- Was the creator a government employee?
- Was the creator an impartial administrative employee?
- Did the creator have a personal connection to the document?
- Did the creator have reasons to alter any of the document's information?

## Who else was cited on the document?

- Who was involved in the event?
- What was their role?
- What laws and customs were in effect?
- What qualified them to participate in the event?

## Why was the record created?

- What was the purpose for the document's creation?
- What laws were applicable in the document's creation?
- Was this a public or private document?
- Was the document created before or after the event?

## Where did you obtain/view the record?

- Archive / Historical Society
- On line website
- Family documents

## What do you know about the document?

- What story does it tell?
- How has the document been preserved?
- Was it donated to a historical society and by whom?
- Is it an original, copy, or compiled record?
- Was it changed in any way?
- Who was involved in the event?
- What laws and customs were in effect?

## Analysis and Interpretation

Document Analysis Worksheets available from the National Archives

[www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/)



## Document Analysis

- Who wrote the document?
- Who was the intended audience?
- What was the story line?
- Why was the document written?
- What type of document was it?
- What was its purpose?
- Did the author make any assumptions?
- Is the document believable?
- What significance does this document have to my ancestor?

## References

- Board for Certification of Genealogists [The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual](#), updated and revised titled [Genealogy Standards](#)
- Christine Rose, [Genealogical Proof Standard, Building a Solid Case](#)
- Elizabeth Shown Mills, [Evidence Explained](#)
- Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor [Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers and Librarians](#)
- George G. Morgan and Drew Smith, [Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques](#)
- Michael Nolan Henderson, [Got Proof!: My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation](#)
- [Thomas W. Jones, Mastering Genealogical Proof](#)
- Barbara Vines Little, "It's Not That Hard to Write Proof Arguments," *OnBoard* 15 (September 2009): 20-23.

The next time you evaluate a genealogical record ask  
**Did you wring it dry?**