

SPECIAL FOCUS AREAS

Research

Family history is an immensely complex subject. Most serious genealogists develop specialties, usually based on locality, ethnicity, subject, or time-period. Successful applicants demonstrate broad and deep knowledge of the whereabouts, customary content, and evidentiary value of records within that specialty. They also demonstrate their ability to collect the data from each source accurately, thoroughly, efficiently, and with full citation to its source.

Analysis and Correlation of Evidence

A sound understanding of the principles of evidence analysis is important to excellence in genealogy. Evidence ranges widely in quality and credibility. Successful applicants are those who know the strengths and shortcomings of all major types of evidence, as well as the minor ones in their areas of special interest.

Compilation

The ability to report the results of research in a professional manner is a vital skill, whether the project is simple or complex and whether the work is done on a personal or commissioned basis. Successful applicants have studied a variety of professional reports and well-crafted essays in scholarly genealogical journals. Many have attended instructional lectures and writing workshops in genealogical forums. Above all, on a daily basis, they put into practice the principles they learn from those resources.

Do you wonder . . . ?

- How you can better prepare yourself for a successful application?
- How you can strengthen your knowledge of records?
- Where you can learn the latest research methodology?
- What educational programs exist beyond the introductory courses in your community?
- What or whether specific academic degrees are necessary?
- What guidebooks you can depend upon for sound advice?
- What qualities successful applicants typically display?



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EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION

Success in almost every field is built upon four cornerstones: specialized education, practical experience, a desire to be the best one can be, and a determination to do a superior job of every task. The successful applicant for certification exhibits these same traits.

Because you are curious about the rewards of certification, you surely have the desire and the determination. Odds are that you also possess a measurable amount of experience by the time you reach the point of thinking about certification. This leaflet, then, will emphasize the first of the four cornerstones—educational preparation.

No specific program of education is required for a successful application. Yet candidates who pursue one or more of the suggestions in this leaflet—whether by self-education or through a formal program—typically submit applications that exhibit deeper knowledge and stronger skills.

FORMAL EDUCATION

Many superb programs exist nationwide. The following spotlights those programs whose quality instruction has endured for decades. Most offer “certificates of completion,” but they also caution that their programs and certificates are *not* to be confused with actual *certification*.

Guided Study

AMERICAN GENEALOGY: A HOME-STUDY COURSE

National Genealogical Society; 3108 Columbia Pike, Suite 300; Arlington, VA 22204-4304. In sixteen lessons that students can pursue at their own pace, NGS offers thorough instruction and hands-on experience with major resources and records analysis. Online mini-courses are also available.

INDEPENDENT STUDY [various programs]

Brigham Young University, 2130 JFSB; Provo, UT 84602-6707. Students can select specialized courses that center upon geographical areas or ethnic groups.

Seminars

LOCAL AND STATE SOCIETIES nationwide sponsor dozens of one- and two-day seminars each year, taught by the nation’s leading genealogists at a very modest fee. The newsletters of the two national societies (see addresses for FGS and NGS at right) carry regular notices of these events.

Institutes

INSTITUTE OF GENEALOGY AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH [IGHR], SAMFORD UNIVERSITY; 800 Lakeshore Drive; Birmingham, AL 35229. Held each June on the Samford campus, this 5-day program offers 10 to 12 structured courses or “tracks”—including beginning, intermediate, advanced, professional, and specialized topics that vary annually. Each course consists of seventeen to twenty 75-minute classes. Limited enrollment. Cosponsored by BCG.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH [NIGR] P.O. Box 724; Lanham, MD 20703-0724. Held each July at the National Archives, this intense 5-day program focuses on NA holdings. Limited enrollment. Cosponsored by BCG.

Major Conferences

FEDERATION OF GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES [FGS] ANNUAL CONFERENCE; P.O. Box 200940, Austin, TX 78720-0940. Held in late summer or early fall at various sites nationwide since 1978, the FGS conference offers circa 150 hours of widely varied instruction in both a classroom and workshop environment.

NATIONAL GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY [NGS] ANNUAL CONFERENCE; 3108 Columbia Pike, Suite 300; Arlington, VA 22204-4304. Held in late spring or early summer at various sites nationwide since 1981, the NGS conference offers circa 150–200 hours of diverse instruction in genealogy, history, technology, and genetics.

PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE, ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL GENEALOGISTS [APG]; P.O. Box 40393; Denver, CO 80204-0393. Held annually in conjunction with the FGS conferences, the PMC is an ideal forum for learning the practical facets of a variety of genealogical endeavors, from client work to librarianship to teaching. Its sponsor, APG, is an open membership organization with a quarterly periodical that is essential reading for progressive genealogists.

Other Instructional Aids

QuickSheet: Citing Online Historical Resources Evidence! Style, by Elizabeth Shown Mills (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2005).

Evidence Analysis: A Research Process Map, prepared for BCG by Elizabeth Shown Mills (Washington, D.C.: Board for Certification of Genealogists, 2006).

SELF-INSTRUCTION

Access to formal classes of advanced instruction may be restricted by travel or financial limitations, but learning opportunities are open to everyone who can subscribe to a good periodical or visit an area library. Your application will be stronger if you apply the following suggestions.

Study major journals

Serious genealogists learn new methodology and resources by regularly and thoroughly reading journals that offer well-crafted, well-documented essays or case studies of difficult problems that have been resolved. Among the most-often recommended publications are the following:

- *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*
- *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*
- *The American Genealogist*
- *The Genealogist*

Study major guide books

Successful applicants are those whose personal library includes a well-rounded stock of major guides to sources, methods, and repositories—and *successful applicants have absorbed the contents of these works!* Knowledge you glean from such guides as those below will be evident in all phases of your well-prepared certification application.

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual.* Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2000.

Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher’s Guide to American Genealogy.* 3d ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., [GPC] 2000.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence! Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian.* Baltimore: GPC, 1997.

———. *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Cyberspace to Artifacts.* Baltimore: GPC, 2007.

———, ed. *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians.* Baltimore: GPC, 2001. Rev. ed. 2010.

Szucs, Loretto Dennis and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking. *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy.* 3d ed. Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2006.