

# Analyzing Evidence: A Research Game Changer

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## The following definitions are quoted from:

*Mastering Genealogical Proof* by Thomas W. Jones and *Evidence Explained* by Elizabeth Shown Mills

## Why analyze evidence?

1. Alerts us to sources that may have more errors than others.
2. Causes us to pursue originals.
3. Strengthens the credibility of our conclusions.

## Start with a research question. What do you want to know? Be specific.

Always try to find the **original**.

Find as many **independent** sources as you can to answer your research question (records created by different entities, for different purposes, at different times).

**Keep in mind no source is immune to error!**

## Sources

(Container)

Sources are published and unpublished works, artifacts, registers, and websites. Sources are not finding aids, indexes, or search engines.

## **Records**

(Document an action or event)

### **Original**

(Not based on prior records)

### **Derivative**

(Created from prior records)

Derivative records include transcriptions, abstractions, translations, and databases.

*The more times that things are recopied the more chance there is for error.*

## **Authored Works**

(Based on information from many prior sources)

Authored works include family histories, obituaries, one-name studies.

*Credibility will depend on how well the author sourced the work.*

## Information

(Content)

Judged by informant's degree of participation or knowledge.

Information also tends to be more reliable the closer in time the information was recorded compared to the event.

## **Primary**

(First hand knowledge)

## **Secondary**

(Second hand knowledge someone told them)

## **Indeterminable/ Unknown**

(Informant is unknown)

*Information can only be primary or secondary when the informant can be inferred.*

One informant may give primary and secondary information on the same document.

*Creating a derivative record from an original one does not change its primary information to secondary information.*

## Evidence

(How we use information items; evidence only exists in our minds)

Based on relevance of information and its adequacy to answer our research question. Evidence does not exist in the absence of a question.

## **Direct**

(Answers research question directly)  
Can be right or wrong.

## **Indirect**

(Two or more information items that suggest an answer to a research question only when combined)

*Combining information from different sources does not make evidence indirect.*

## **Negative**

(Absence of information that answers a research question)

*Contextually suggestive silence.*

**Proof rests on the sum of evidence.**