

Genealogy Do-Over – Step 6

Topics: 1) Evaluating Evidence and 2) Reviewing Online Education Options

For Step Six we turn to one of the most important and often neglected areas of genealogical research: **Evidence Evaluation**. As I've stated in the past, not determining whether a source was credible, would often come back to haunt me in later research. I've admitted this shortcoming and now I'm resolved to do something about it!

In addition, we begin to look at different types of educational opportunities available for genealogists. With Step Six, the focus is on those offerings online, both free and fee-based. Ongoing education is a crucial part of not only becoming a good genealogist, but keeping your current skills finely honed and acquiring new skills!

Evaluating Evidence

Once I've gathered various bits of evidence for a proof point, such as my own birth date, and I've entered them in my research log, the next task: evaluating the evidence to determine whether my birth date can be proven or not.

In the past my evaluation of evidence consisted of saying to myself, "Well, if it is in a book it must be true!" or "If it is on someone's tree, why would they lie?" Then I would enter the data in my genealogy database program and go on my merry way.

Now, I'm using a process to really look at the evidence I've found and to "rank" it based on certain elements. The evaluation elements that I use are from [QuickLesson 17: The Evidence Analysis Process Map](#) at the Evidence Explained website.

I've included the basic evaluation information in a separate tab of my Genealogy Research Log so I can refer to it when evaluating a line entry in the research log. I also make notes in the Analysis column to support my theory as to proving or disproving my birth date.

Here's an example using a certified copy of my birth certificate that I have in my possession:

- **Source Type:** Derivative. It is a copy of the original record at the repository, in this case the New York State Department of Health, Vital Records. Some would argue that an official copy could still be called an Original instead of a Derivative, but for the standards I am using, I feel comfortable using Derivative.
- **Clarity:** Clear. I can read the text, it is typewritten or printed, and I don't need to guess at words.
- **Information:** Primary. Although this is a copy, the original birth certificate was filed soon after my birth and is very close in time to the birth event. It was also filed with an official government agency required to keep an accurate record of such events.

- **Evidence Type:** Direct. My birth date, location and other information is explicitly stated on the record; the information does not need to be inferred.

So, my birth certificate is “Derivative, Clear, Primary and Direct” as I call it. It would rank higher as a reliable record than say a birth announcement in the newspaper (not knowing who the informant was) or a Delayed Birth Certificate that is filed years later and based on one or more sworn affidavits by myself and/or others.

Reviewing Online Education Options

With Step Six, The Genealogy Do-Over asks participants to start reviewing options for genealogy education and the focus is online resources (we look for “offline” resources in Step Seven!).

As you can imagine, I’m a big proponent of not just genealogy education, but online genealogy education as well. Webinars are a big part of my own genealogy business and over the past five years, the genealogy industry has seen explosive growth in “distance education.”

So why do we pursue genealogy education? Not only to become better genealogists, but also because new record sets come online or are available at repositories and we want to use them as efficiently as possible. In addition, we may discover an ancestor from a new location and we’re not familiar with research in that area.

Here is a resource listing for free online genealogy education resources: [RESOURCES Free Online Genealogy Educational Resources](#) (opens in PDF). As you can see, there are some gaps especially in the area of Canadian, UK and Australian resources.

Step 6 To Do List – Full Do-Over Participants

- **Evaluating Evidence:** Consider following my example of implementing evidence evaluation into your genealogy research process. Yes, it can be time consuming, but just like citing sources, once you’ve gotten into the habit, it becomes easier and you feel more confident in completing the task.
- **Reviewing Online Education Options:** Review the [RESOURCES Free Online Genealogy Educational Resources](#) (opens in PDF) and consider creating an Education Plan. Start with small goals and then look for webinars, videos and other online resources that can help you achieve those goals.

Step 6 To Do List – Review or “Go-Over” Participants

- **Evaluating Evidence:** If you are reviewing your existing research, it may be difficult to evaluate evidence if you haven’t cited sources. In addition, some genealogy database software programs don’t make it easy to evaluate evidence. Determine the best method for your current data; it may actually help to use a program such as Evidentia, Clooz or one of the other evidence evaluation software packages.

- **Reviewing Online Education Options:** There isn't much different for the "go-over" or "review" participants – we all need genealogy education whether we are doing a complete "do-over" or not. See the plans above and determine what is a good fit for your learning style and the gaps in your genealogy skills.

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