

Write it Up

Tools of the Trade

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“Soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusion eliminates the possibility that the conclusion is based on bias, preconception, or inadequate appreciation of the evidence. It also shows or explains how the evidence leads to the conclusion.”

Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, (New York : Ancestry.com 2014), 3.

Why write up your research?

- Make connections in your research.
- Prove your research.
- Preserve your research.
- Share your research.

Who is your reader?

- Before you write, you need to decide who will be reading your research findings.
- Keeping your audience in mind will help you write in the appropriate style.
- You will want to be clear and accurate in any case.

Determine your audience

- Clients – research reports
- Fellow genealogists – article for a quarterly
- Family members - a family history book
- Anyone - a proof summary or proof argument on *FamilySearch* or an online tree
- Yourself - recording your personal research notes

Find your voice

- Be consistent with the “voice” in your writing
 - Third person is more formal – good for family history books, proof summaries, research reports: “Florence Kelsey married . . .”
- Be consistent with the “voice” in your writing
 - Second person – works well for a letter report to a client: “Your grandmother was married in. . .”
- Be consistent with the “voice” in your writing
 - First person – less formal report or letter: “I discovered the marriage record of Florence Kelsey. . .”

TIP

Write first, then go through the rough draft and make the needed changes so the voice is consistent throughout.

Begin with a Research Report

- Make sense of your research by writing a report.
- A report can be for your own research notes, a client report, become a proof summary, article, or incorporated into a book.

Elements of a Research Report

- Research Objective
- Background Information
- Body of the Report
- Conclusion
- Summary of Evidence
- Future Research Suggestions

Research Objective

- Clearly state the focus of the research project.
- Use key identifiers with names, dates, and places of main individual.
- Example: *The objective of this report was to prove the parents of Mary Ann, wife of Ignatius Bryan, resident of Hardin County, Kentucky in 1800. Mary Ann was born about 1782 and died after 1835.*

Background Information

- Begin with some background on the individual or family.
- Include what had previously been known, including any family myths.
- Information about the time period or location might be helpful.
- Include whatever you feel sets the stage for your findings.
- EXAMPLE: *Determining the maiden name and parents of a woman born in the late 1700's is one of the most difficult genealogical undertakings. Because women were not mentioned in many of the records of the era, few sources exist to prove their parentage. Combine that with record loss and the task becomes even more difficult. Descendants of Ignatius Bryan, born about 1775 in Maryland and died 1803 in Hardin County, Kentucky have long wondered about the origins of his wife Mary.*

Body of the Report

- **Use sub-headings or chapters to organize the report, article, or book**
- Chronological
- Geographical
- By individual
- By family group
- By record type
- EXAMPLE: Organization by Record Types and Chronological Events
 - *Marriage Records*
 - *Land Records of Hardin County*
 - *Probate of the Estate of Ignatius Bryan*
 - *County Histories and Church Records*

Elements to Include in the Body of the Report

- Explain the reasoning behind searching a certain record type.
- Present the evidence that supports your conclusion.
- Include negative as well as positive searches.
- Use source citations for each genealogical statement.

Explain the reasoning of using a record type: i.e. Marriage Record

Sample Report

[Mary Ann French Bryan Atwood](#)
[1782-1835/1840](#)

Go to:

<http://familylocket.com/services/>
 and scroll down to "sample research reports."

Or go to:

<http://familylocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Mary-French-Report.pdf>

Active Verbs

After writing the rough draft, go back through and circle the passive "be" verbs: is, are, were. Rewrite the sentences using action verbs when possible. Keep a list of good action verbs to use: determined, revealed, searched, discovered, found, etc.

- Example: *Marriage records are some of the earliest vital records available and are generally recorded in the county of the marriage. A marriage record will list the bride's maiden name if it's her first marriage and can have her father's name as well, so that would be the first place to search for Mary's maiden name and possibly father.*

Include negative as well as positive searches

- Example: *A thorough search of both locations in online collections and published marriage indexes were searched but no record was found for Mary and Ignatius in either county. It would seem that the marriage took place in another location, or quite possibly the marriage record was lost. Tracing the couple beyond Kentucky, might result in a marriage record, if they were married before their migration to the newly formed state*

Explain the reasoning of using a record type: i.e. Land Record

- Example: *"Land records can provide important clues for an individual and even a family. Ignatius Bryan is first mentioned in the land records of Hardin County on 26 November 1800 when he purchased 85 acres of land near the Rolling Fork above the mouth of Clear Creek from James Murdough. As mentioned previously, Ignatius is noted as being "of Nelson County."*

Format evidence for clarity

Indenture made 15 August 1826

Hardin County, Kentucky [Bullet points inserted for clarity and children bolded]

- George Atwood & Mary his wife late Mary Bryan Widow of Ignatius Bryant deceased
- William Norris & Elizabeth his wife late **Elizabeth Bryant**
- John Atwood Medly and Elen his wife late **Elen Bryant**
- **Benjamin Bryant** and Treacy his wife

Present the evidence that supports your conclusion

- EXAMPLE: *The 1826 deed states that Ignatius Bryan died intestate, meaning that he left no will. In this circumstance, if there is property involved, the probate proceedings are set in motion. At a county court for Hardin County, Kentucky on Monday, the 19th of September 1803, Mary Brian & Barton Rheuby applied for and were granted the right of administration of the estate of Ignatius Brian, deceased. Together with James French and Isaac Irwin, they gave bond of £200 with securities for the faithful performance of administration.*

Explain difficult evidence

- EXAMPLE: *"Generally, those applying for administration of an intestate estate are the surviving spouse and next of kin, so what relationship to Mary Bryan are Barton Rheuby [Roby], James French, or Isaac Irwin? "*
- *"Examining further probate records showed that Barton Roby acted as administrator for all further actions for the estate of Ignatius Bryan and also for the estate of James French. He received payment for his service and appears throughout the court records administering various estates. He seems to have been the family attorney."*
- *"Research proved that Isaac Irwin was born in 1774 and would have been about age 30 when he gave security for the estate bond, too young to be Mary's father. He was also named in another court order with Ignatius in 1802 as potential appraisers of an estate. Hence they were probably just friends. There is no indication that he is related to Mary Brian. **James French therefore seems the most likely candidate for Mary's father.**"*

Add applicable information on the history and the laws of the time

- EXAMPLE: *Who was the James French mentioned in the probate of Ignatius Bryan? County histories became popular in the late 1800's and can be valuable sources of information about early settlers in an area. In the 1887 publication of *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, author Joseph Webb Benedict discusses early Catholic settlers in the area of Hardin County, Kentucky. "The first church station at this point was the house of one James French where mass was said by Father Badin as early as the years 1804-5."*

Document every genealogical fact stated with a source citation

- Copy source citations from your research log.
- Use the software footnote capability

- CTRL ALT F is the shortcut.
- Benedict Joseph Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, (----- : Charles Rodgers, 1884), reproduction (Evansville, Indiana : Unigraphics, 1977); Google Books.

Document Organization

- Create a document folder for the research project at the beginning of research.
- Download each document and give it a descriptive file name: 1835 Census, Mary French Perry County MO.
- Assemble documents at the end of the project, following the order in the report.

Make Connections

- EXAMPLE: **Mary Ann French, sister of Monica, 52 years**
- *"If Mary Ann French is the sister of Monica, her father would also be James French. Why are the women listed by their maiden names? It appears from the rest of the listings on the page that this was careful record keeping on the part of the parish. All women on the page are listed by their maiden name and their father is identified."*

Use tables to clarify information

- EXAMPLE:

Marriage of Monarca French and John Layton	1799	Hardin County, Kentucky	Names parents James French and Susanna
Probate of Ignatius Bryan	1803	Hardin County, Kentucky	James French provided security for bond with Mary Bryan, widow of Ignatius Bryan
Will of James French	1815	Hardin County, Kentucky	Names daughter, Mary French, and wife, Susanna
Barrens Parish Census	1835	Perry County, Kentucky	Names James French, father of Monica French and Mary Ann French, sister of Monica French (women listed by maiden name in household of John Layton)

Summarize the Evidence

- EXAMPLE: *The Mary French mentioned in the will of James French is almost certainly the same Mary who was the wife of Ignatius Bryan and George Atwood. Because the marriage record of Monica French lists parents as James and Susanna and the parish census of 1835 lists Mary Ann as Monica's sister, with father James, it can be proven that James French was the father of Mary Ann.*

Summary of Findings & Conclusion

- Write a clear, concise paragraph summarizing the findings.
- Bullet point key items using action verbs – can also include at the beginning of a client report
 - "Searched the census records"
 - "Studied the county history"
 - "Determined that"
 - "Evaluated online family trees"

Citation Tips

- Create source citations in the research log the first time a source is searched.
- Use complete source citations throughout the report until finished.
- Shorten subsequent citations only when satisfied with the flow of the report.
- Create a citation template sheet.

Conclusion

- EXAMPLE: *The objective of this research project was to determine the parents of Mary, wife of Ignatius Bryan. Numerous original records were located that provided information on the couple. Although records listing females are not frequent in the early 1800's, Mary does appear in several of those records. Land, tax, probate, and a second marriage record established her as a resident of Hardin County, Kentucky.*
- Recap the Findings
 - **Land and tax records** for both Ignatius and Mary Bryan show the purchase, taxation, and sale of 85 acres on the Rolling Fork water course of Hardin County, Kentucky
 - **Probate records** for the estate of Ignatius Bryan detail key actions in the administration of the estate. Importantly, the initial motion lists James French with Mary as putting up bond for the administration of the estate.
 - **Marriage records** for Hardin and Nelson Counties do not show a marriage for Ignatius Bryan and Mary, but the 1813 marriage of Mary Bryan and George Atwood in Hardin County was located.

Client Writing Tip

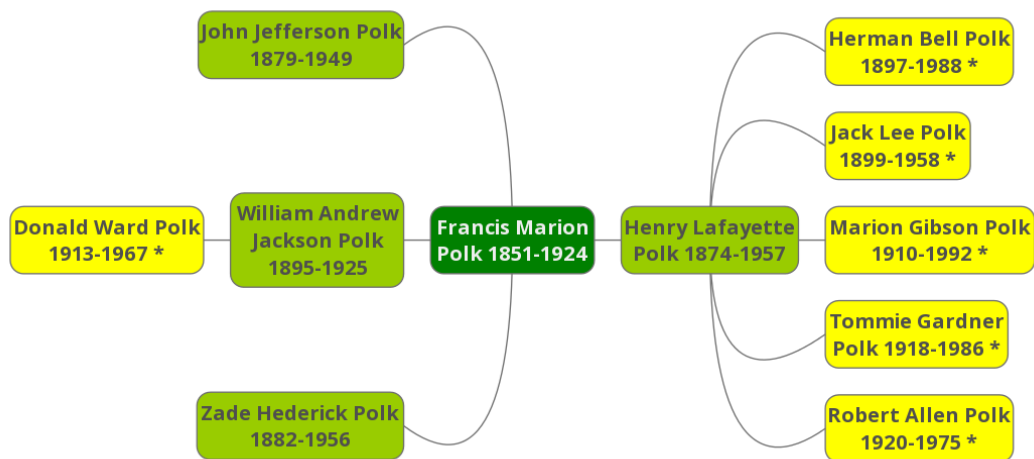
- When writing for a client, frame the research positively.
- Help the client to understand the value of negative findings.

Future Research Suggestions

- A research report either for a client or yourself should include ideas for the next research session.
- Include these at the end of the report in a bullet point format for ease of use.
- *Example: Search for a marriage record in St. Mary's County, Maryland for Mary French and Ignatius Bryan :1795-1800*

Extras

- Add maps for interest and clarity
- Create diagrams with mind mapping or charting software
- Chart family relationships, indirect evidence, DNA testing suggestions, anything you can think of!



Tips for excellent writing

- Proofread
- Set aside your writing for a few days
- Use good grammar and punctuation
- Eliminate trite phrases
- Take out excess words
- Develop your own style

Additional Resources

[Research Like a Pro Part 6: Write it Up – blog post at FamilyLocket.com](http://familylocket.com/research-like-a-pro-part-6-write-it-up/)
<http://familylocket.com/research-like-a-pro-part-6-write-it-up/>

[Research Project Template – Word file download at FamilyLocket.com](http://familylocket.com/doing-a-genealogy-research-project-from-start-to-finish/)
<http://familylocket.com/doing-a-genealogy-research-project-from-start-to-finish/>