The Proof is in the Details
Evaluate your source ~

1. Original vs. Derivative
2. Primary vs. Secondary
3. Analyze the Source
4. Cite the source
Original vs. Derivative

- **Original Source** = Person or record whose information does not come from data already spoken or written (*e.g.* eyewitness)

- **Derivative Source** = Person or record that supplies information that is repeated, reproduced, transcribed, abstracted, or summarized from something already spoken or written (*e.g.* County’s centennial history)
Primary vs. Secondary

- **Primary** = Record created at the time of the event by someone who knew of the information firsthand.

- **Secondary** = Information compiled or gathered, but not actually experienced or witnessed by the person who recorded it, and therefore requires more verification.
What do you think?

- **Birth record**
  Could there be discrepancies?

- **Death record**
  What info. might be wrong?

- **Marriage record**
  Does a marriage bond mean the couple actually got married?
What do you think (cont.)

❖ Census records

*Do you know who the informant was?*  
*[Only residence info. is primary data]*

❖ Land records

*Do the parties have a mutual interest in a correct document?*

❖ Probate records

*Could an heir who is also exec. have a conflict of interest?*
A few more examples..

- **Military records**
  
  *Since application was completed by veteran or widow, could either have a financial incentive to misrepresent facts?*

- **Church records**
  
  *Could church officials have moral bias that could effect record keeping?*
Being a secondary source doesn’t make it wrong...

- It can simplify research and help point toward where to find original records
- Verify as many details as possible with original records, where available
- Lacking original data, “build a case”
- Some may be more accurate than others, depending on the quality of the research and the researcher
Questions to ask yourself:

✓ When was this record / account created? Near the event or later?
✓ Who created it or provided the information?
✓ Why was the record made? Legal requirement, personal account, duplicate of original, family story?
Questions to ask yourself (cont.)

✓ Where was the record / data produced?
✓ What was the original form? Was the record created from pre-existing material?
✓ How credible is the content or author?
Be Skeptical, but not Cynical ~

- Given when the record was created, is there a greater likelihood of errors?
- Could there be a bias, fraud, memory or time lapses, contradictory evidence, other factors?
- Is it self-serving, or written to promote something?
- Why would the writer misrepresent the facts?
- Was there motive to delay / hasten reporting the event?
Why cite your source?

✓ So you can give credit where credit is due ~ it’s the right thing to do

✓ So others can evaluate your research

✓ So you know where you have looked & the results, including the date & location of the source

✓ So you can compare quality & reliability of your sources
What is “copyright”, and why do I need to know about it?

- Copyright ...the right to reproduce and distribute copies of a “work of authorship”, to create adaptations or derivative works and to ... publicly display the work. Only the copyright holder owns these right.

- Original or new (not derived from other sources) written, visual, musical & architectural works are copyrighted
• Basic facts of ancestor’s life (birth, marriage, death dates & places) are not protected by copyright, but narrative is...

• Even if item is in public domain, you may still need permission from physical owner, such as an archive, to use it.
Compilation, such as a collections of works, is protected by copyright

Professional photographs are copyrighted

People in a group photo, even for a family reunion, have a right to privacy. Ask their permission & the photographer’s to use

“Public domain” = copyright has expired or lapsed, or work is not copyrightable
Copyright (cont.)

• It’s your responsibility to determine if material is protected by copyright
• “Fair use” allows for use of copyrighted material in a small portion for socially productive purposes, like in your personal database, but not for profit, such as in your published family history, without author’s permission.
• Rule of thumb ~ Quote or paraphrase only as much as necessary to make your point, and, cite the original work as your source.
Things to consider ~

- Trust, but verify (Ronald Reagan)
- Be as “certain” as you need to be
- Know what counts – numbers can be manipulated to prove anything
- When in doubt, qualify your statements (e.g. “likely”, “may have”, “given other factors, probably...”
Final Thoughts …

- Remember ~ family history information is only as reliable as the person who provides it.