



FORMATTING A NARRATIVE GENEALOGY

Work that stands the test of time

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Good news! You can write your ancestors' amazing story in an engaging manner *and* meet genealogical standards for excellence. **Narrative genealogies** demonstrate a line of descent and kinship across multiple generations. They offer a clear, effective, well-organized format for sharing your research results.

DECISIONS

What is your purpose? Who is your audience?

- **Publication.** Genealogical societies and publications have their own preferred styles and formats. Your work must conform to their requirements.
- **Certification.** As part of a Board for Certification portfolio, a “kinship determination” project must meet standards for scope, accuracy, organization, and format.
- **Family.** Although personal use offers some latitude, your research deserves the best presentation.

Who is included?

- Genealogies document descent from one person or couple. At least one generation in a genealogy presents more than one couple or family.
- **Single-surname** studies focus upon descendants who carry the featured family name.
- **Full-family** studies treat all lines of descent, by whatever surname.
- Complex family situations require special considerations of ethics, honesty, and clarity.

NARRATIVE GENEALOGIES

All genealogies include vital statistics and descriptive biographical narrative for each individual, couple, and generation. These details confirm kinship and provide generational context.

Keys to organization: Basic structure

- Preface—an historical overview of the family and/or introduction of each generation
- Families are presented and discussed one generation at a time, in descending order.
- **Genealogical summary**—paragraph introducing individual and his/her spouse
 - Birth, death, and marriage data for each individual and spouse(s)
 - Descending genealogies include a **parenthetical summary of descent**.
- Proof summary or argument, if necessary, to establish identity and confirm kinship
- Biography—life story
- Final paragraph—conclusion of life story, **introduction of child list**
- **Child list**—Children of each couple are presented in chronological birth order; usually 1-point smaller font. Individuals not carried forward may be discussed in the child list.
- **Source citations** as footnotes or endnotes; usually 2 points smaller font.

FOUR TYPES OF NUMBERS

Genealogies present information one generation at a time and rely on numbering systems to identify and organize individuals, families, and generations.

1. **Source citation numbers** connect every stated fact not “general knowledge” to its source. In-text superscript citation numbers, assigned sequentially, usually appear *after* punctuation; not italicized.
2. **Generational numbers and letters** place individuals in generational context.
 - American generations are designated with numbers. In descending genealogies, the earliest American generation is 1.
 - European or other foreign country ancestors are designated with letters.
 - Pre-American generations are assigned capital letters.
 - Non-emigrating siblings and their children are designated with lower-case letters.
 - Collateral lines emigrating to America are designated by combining lower case letters and numbers.
 - Generational numbers and letters appear in specific context:
 - In the title of each generational discussion
 - Placed *after* given names, *before* surnames and *before* punctuation
 - Introduction of individuals in genealogical summaries and parenthetical summaries of descent
 - Introductions to child lists
 - First child identified in the child list, implying the generation of consecutive children
3. **Child list birth order numbers**
 - Children are numbered in birth order using lower-case Roman numerals followed by a period.
4. **Arabic identification numbers**, unique to each individual, place each person in genealogical context.
 - Individual numbers are assigned sequentially; not superscripted or italicized.
 - When included with the genealogical summary, they are bold, followed by a period.
 - In the child list they are not bold and not followed by a period.

SPECIAL CASES

A good genealogical numbering system accommodates all family members. As you format special situations, consider: How does the child relate to one or both parents? By what surname will the child be known? Include relationship clarifications in child list introductions, genealogical summaries, and parenthetical summaries of descent.

FORMATTING SYSTEMS

The *Register System* was developed by the New England Historic and Genealogical Society, Boston, in 1870. The *NGS Quarterly (NGSQ) System* was developed by the National Genealogical Society in 1912. Both conform to the basic organizational structure. Both use four types of numbers, with minor differences in style. All systems format dates Day Month Year (example: 31 December 2020).

Differences in genealogical summaries

- *Register* uses boldface and **SMALL CAPITALS** to introduce individuals.
 - Parenthetical summaries of descent are italicized.
 - Generational numbers and letters are not italicized.
- *NGSQ* uses **boldface**.
 - Parenthetical summaries of descent are not italicized.
 - Generational numbers and letters are italicized.

Differences in source citation numbers. *Register* in-text citation numbers are [bracketed].

Differences in child lists

- *Register* child names are SMALL CAPITALS; abbreviations in data acceptable.
- *NGSQ* child names are ALL CAPITALS; abbreviations in data not generally acceptable.
- *Register* provides limited vital data for children carried forward.
- *NGSQ* includes all known vital data for all children, whether carried forward or not.

Differences in Arabic identification numbers

Descending genealogies do not assign identification numbers to spouses.

- *Register* assigns identification numbers only to individuals carried forward to the next generation.
- *NGSQ* assigns numbers to all known individuals (not spouses); a “+” sign in the child list indicates an individual is carried forward to the next generation.

WRITING JOY! TOOLS FOR LIFE STORIES

- **Timelines** are a simple, effective tool for visualizing individuals and families in historical context. Try to account for each year of life. Incorporate relevant historical events.
- **Social history** places individuals in context of broader society. Explore technological, cultural, and societal trends identified in historical and newspaper accounts of the era.
- Even if your ancestor left no written account, the letters, diaries and oral histories of his/her contemporaries offer insights into what life was like.
- Family photographs, relevant illustrations, maps, and charts add interest and depth to the story.
- Build the stories around themes for individuals or generational stories

EXTRAS

Depending on project scope, optional features can help readers better navigate and understand your work’s organizational structure. Word processing software makes formatting extras easier.

- **Pagination:** a must, regardless of project length.
- Title page, table of contents
- Indexes: everypname, locations
- Pedigree charts, family trees to illustrate the “big picture”

RESOURCES

URLs valid as of 1 December 2020

1. Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG). *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd edition. Nashville, TN: Ancestry.com, 2019.
<https://www.bcgcertification.org>
2. Curran, Joan Ferris, Madilyn Coen Crane, and John H. Wray. *Numbering Your Genealogy: Basic Systems, Complex Families and International Kin*, revised edition. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society (NGS), 2008.
<https://www.ngsgenealogy.org>
3. Leclerc, Michael J., & Henry B. Hoff, editors. *Genealogical Writing in the 21st Century: A Guide to Register Style and More*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2006.
4. Kozachek, Thomas. *Guidelines for Authors of Compiled Genealogies*. Boston: Newbury Street Press, 1998.
5. *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society.
6. *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. Boston: New England Historic and Genealogical Society.
7. Stratton, Penelope L. & Henry B. Hoff. *Guide to Genealogical Writing*. 3rd ed. Boston: New England Hist. Gen. Soc., 2014.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: NGSQ EXAMPLE

NOTE: Due to space limitations, source citations are not included. In a completed work, each stated fact that is not "general knowledge" would be documented with a footnote or endnote. Non-italicized, superscript source citation numbers would be included in-text.

Generational heading → **Generation 4**

Optional subtitle or theme, introduction → **A Good Man** **Genealogical summary**

Land ownership was often a prime motivator for immigrants to America, and Robert Martin in 1811 moved his family from Pittsburgh to Ohio, where they settled on a farm in Belmont County. One year later, the war of 1812 forever changed the lives of Robert's children...

Arabic individual identification number **Generational designations** **Parenthetical summary of descent**

→ **23. William Henry⁴ Martin** (John Howe³, Josiah², Robert^{a-1}, William⁴) was born 14 March 1842 in Fayette County, Ohio; died 9 June 1917 in Van Buren County, Iowa. He married (1) **Mary Elizabeth Turner** on 3 November 1870 in Van Buren County. She was born 14 June 1844 in Ohio, the daughter of George T. Turner and Margaret Hedges; died 7 July 1875 in Van Buren County. He married (2) **Mary Jane Bryan** on 28 April 1878 in Van Buren County. She was born 1 May 1851 in Iowa, the daughter of William Bryan and Nancy Christie; died 6 August 1924 in Van Buren County.

[Proof discussion or argument here, if necessary]
[Proceed with life story...]

From Ohio to Iowa ← **Optional subtitles for extensive life stories**

William Henry Martin migrated with his parents from Ohio to Iowa when he was about twelve years old ... As a teenager, he worked as a laborer on his uncle John Martin's farm...

Civil War Era

William did not enlist in the Civil War, but he was listed on local militia rolls and in 1863 he registered for the federal draft...Between 1863 and 1869, William at times worked as a farm laborer, at other times as a mill "engineer," toiling to keep the steam engines running...

[Conclude life story, introduce child lists. Separate lists for each spouse] **Generational designations**

William Henry⁴ Martin and Mary Turner had the following children:

- + 24 i. CHARLES EDWARD⁵ MARTIN, born 13 August 1871, Van Buren County, Iowa; died 20 February 1945, Skagit Count, Washington. He married Rose Neise on 28 December 1897 in Keosauqua, Van Buren County.... *[Include all known vital statistics]* 1 pt. smaller font
- + 25 ii. EMMA BLANCHE MARTIN, born 28 September 1872, Jefferson County, Iowa...
- 26 iii. FRANK T. MARTIN, born 14 April 1874, Jefferson County, Iowa; died 4 July 1938...
[children not carried forward to the next generation may be discussed in child list]

Individuals carried forward for full discussion in the next generation

William Henry⁴ Martin and Mary Jane Bryan had the following children:

- 27 i. NANCY OLIVE⁵ MARTIN, born 11 October 1879....
- 28 ii. BERT LEROY MARTIN, born 5 May 1882...
- 29 iii. CORA ETTA MARTIN, born 18 July 1884...

Arabic individual identification number

Birth order *[optional: continue birth order numbering: iv., v., vi.]*