Sourcing is your reputation – if you want anyone to believe your work, the more the merrier.

What is a source?

These are definitely sources:

→ Birth, Marriage, and Death certificates
→ Census records
→ Land records
→ Court records
→ Directories
→ School, Church, and Cemetery Records
→ DNA matches

But these are also sources:

→ So-and-so said
→ interviews
→ Family lore
→ Address books
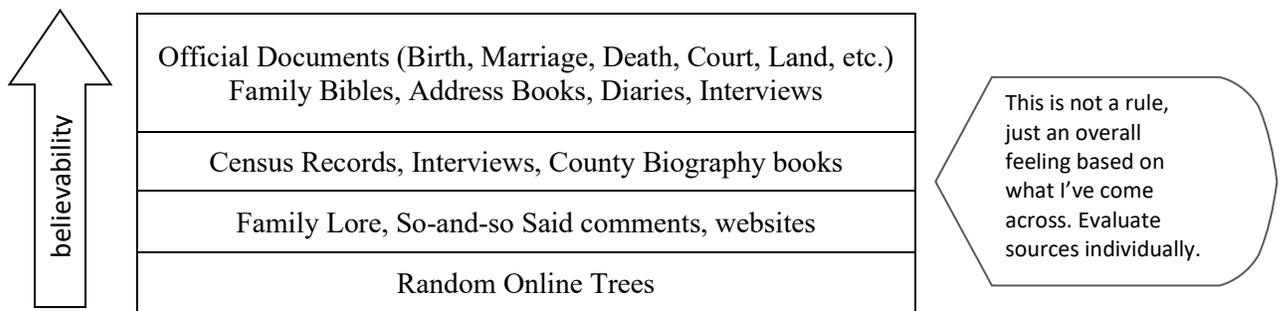→ Diaries
→ Funeral cards
→ Birth and wedding announcements

Everything can be a source… yes, even other family trees you find online.

Why do you want sources?

→ To confirm vitals (birth, marriage, and death dates)
→ To fill in life events
→ To tell someone's story
→ To link generations
→ To be confident in your findings
→ If you're interested… to join descendant societies

So, when you reference something the question is…

What is the QUALITY of the source - how believable is it?

believability →	
Official Documents (Birth, Marriage, Death, Court, Land, etc.) Family Bibles, Address Books, Diaries, Interviews	
Census Records, Interviews, County Biography books	
Family Lore, So-and-so Said comments, websites	
Random Online Trees	

This is not a rule, just an overall feeling based on what I've come across. Evaluate sources individually.

Everything can have errors, intentional or not, some common issues:

→ Lying about ages on marriage licenses (maybe to avoid needing parental consent)
→ Person giving information may not know and guesses
    o Census – ages, birthplaces, education level, immigration year
    o Death records – birthdates, birthplaces, parents' information
    o Interviews and Stories – people may not remember details or memories get muddled over time
→ Recording official can't understand a person and writes what they hear (or think they hear)
    o Names can be different or misspelled
    o Sexes can be incorrect
→ Errors on other trees and collective trees:
    o People with the same name are confused, leading to
        ✧ a blend of information
        ✧ connecting additional relatives
    o Sources are obviously incorrect but attached regardless

So, what do you do?

- → First question: Does the source have any merit?
- → Document information based on sources you find
    - o Focus on unique entries, not the same one in multiple places (i.e. a marriage license in an index and an image)
    - o <u>Always</u> examine an image of the document if possible
        - ✧ indexes can have transcription errors and often have less information than the document itself
    - o Only refer to another tree as a last resort – with the understanding you should research this person/line further
    - o Conflicting information? Document it too.
- → As you gather information, the outliers tend to be flushed out
- → Once apparent, label incorrect information as *alternate* or *disproved,* but keep it around for reference
- → Examine information with a critical eye
    - o Does it make sense, does it *feel* right?
    - o Can it be possible?
        - ✧ Does it look like the person is in two places at once?
        - ✧ Is a parent born after the child? or have a child at age five?
    - o Are surrounding family members consistent (FAN – Friends, Associates, and Neighbors)
- → If it feels right but you're not sure
    - o go with it for the moment and see how it works out
    - o keep a big note that you aren't sure
    - o later, if it's good, great – keep it
    - o if not, no problem – delete it (maybe keep a note to avoid following that lead again)

What not to do:

- → Don't build your tree just by copying info from other trees
  They can be a great starting point but that's it … Keep going, look for confirming evidence.
- → Don't see a name on a document and assume that's your person – look closer and see if it fits
  (This can be problematic (or impossible) for indexed only records with little to no information other than a name)
- → Don't give up! Step away from a person or line for a while but come back to it now and again, more information becomes available all the time.

How do you cite sources?
It depends on where your tree is:

Online trees like Ancestry or My Heritage
- → Attach records from the site (subscription needed)
- → Link webpages
- → Upload photos or files
- → Write notes on what information you found elsewhere and the source reference

Software on your computer
- → Make a reference for the source
  (Programs likely have a feature to build citation, even in free versions.)
- → Attach the reference to all pertinent items
- → Link photos and documents (to the source, to the event, to the person – it's up to you)

How do you reference a source?

There is a correct way to write a reference with very strict rules. (Remember MLA and Chicago style? Did you catch Peg's talk about the Genealogical Proof Standard?) But most of us are not worried about that level of correctness and, as long as it serves it's purpose, you and those you share your work with will feel pretty confident in what you have.

The goal: to be able to find the source again. What you need in the reference depends on the source type (again, software programs can help). Here are a few examples for items such as:

- → Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates: issuing state and county, record name, date issued, person(s) the record is for
- → Books: title, author, publishing company and date, volume (if applicable), pages referenced
- → Magazines and newspapers: title, publishing date, page, article, author
- → Census: where taken (country, state, city, etc.), date, page, household, names
- → Database: title, where found, date updated, person(s) referenced
- → Website: title, subject, url, information referenced, date accessed