

How to Write Effective "Reason" Statement in the FamilySearch Family Tree

Whenever you add, edit, or delete information about an individual in your family tree, you should explain why you are making the change. This reasoning is intended to prevent improper changes and to direct other interested researchers to the sources that prove the information.

Guidelines

In your explanation, include the following types of information, as appropriate to the situation:

- Write clearly. Use complete sentences.
- Avoid using "I" statements (such as "I found that..." or "My research indicates..."). Write in third person (such as "The census shows that..."). This keeps the tone professional and neutral. It also focuses the explanation on the ancestor whose data is being recorded and the sources used to find the data.
- Indicate what information is clearly supported by sources and which is not. For example, if the birth month and year came from a census, say so.
- Identify the sources you used. If possible, you should also attach those sources to the individual.
- If the records contain contradictory or incorrect information, explain why you think the version that you added is the most correct in spite of the evidence provided by other records.
- Explain why the information contradicts family stories.
- Explain why the information is correct, even though it may seem illogical.

- If you derived or estimated the information, explain how you reached your conclusion.
- If you are deleting information, explain why the information you are deleting is not correct and why it should be deleted instead of corrected.
- Point out relevant discussions.

The reason fields are not the place to hold a dialog or debate with other users. Do not use them to post questions or requests for information. If an issue needs to be discussed or if you need to request additional information, use the Discussions feature rather than a reason field.

Examples

All Sources Agree

If all of the sources about a piece of information agree, you can simply state those sources. For example:

Mary's birth certificate, 1920 U.S. census, marriage certificate, and death certificate all indicate that her full name was Mary Ellen Blackshaw.

Sources Contradict Each Other or Family Stories

Frequently, sources contradict each other. Sources may contradict family stories that have been passed down. In these cases, your reason statement should explain why you entered the version you did. For example:

There is contradictory evidence regarding the year of Mary Ellen Blackshaw's birth (although the day and month appear to be undisputed). Her death certificate (reported by her son, Rex Baird), indicated she was born 25 February 1869, as does her obituary. However her grave marker states she was born 25 February 1868. She self reported that she was age thirty-eight at the time she obtained her marriage license in November 1906 (which by calculation would mean that she was born in 1868). Also,

an 80th birthday party was held for her and her husband on 29 February 1948 (which by calculating would mean that she was born in 1868). Finally, the birth certificate for her daughter, Thalia Baird, indicated that she was forty-four years old in May 1912 (indicating she was born in 1868). From these sources, it appears that she understood her birth year to be 1868, and the most credible evidence seems to preponderate in favor of 25 February 1868.

No Source Exists for Information Being Deleted

Sometimes information appears in the tree, and no source can be found to validate it. If you delete the information, provide a reason for doing so:

Mary's name has been documented on several sources, including her birth certificate, various censuses, church records, and so forth. None of the original sources found to date indicate that she had a middle name.

An Index Contains an Error

Indexes of original records frequently contain transcription errors.

The Utah Marriage index shows their date of marriage to be 14 June 14, 1927, however, the marriage license, church records, and Western States Marriage Index indicate they were married 15 June 1927, in Manti, Utah.

Estimated and Approximated Dates

Sometimes a source contains partial information. It may list only the person's age instead of providing a birth date. In the Family Tree, you can enter the estimated birth date and explain how you obtained it, for example:

"The journal of Michael Hansen, William's brother, indicates that William was seven years old during the 1918 flu pandemic."