# Chapter 6: High Research Standards in Professional Research

As you study this chapter, imagine you aspire to be a professional genealogist. How would you apply the GPS to your research? Remember, the GPS applies to all aspects of research, whether amateur or professional.

Also consider what types of employment you could secure. What skills and attitudes are necessary to be successful?

In this chapter, you'll explore some basic professional skills and learn about professional organizations and careers in the field of family history.



## Professional Correspondence

### Study Questions

* SQ: What concepts or skills should you apply as you write professional correspondence?
* SQ: What should you avoid to ensure your correspondence is professional?
* SQ: What are the parts of a professional email?

When many people think about professional genealogists, they envision an older researcher reading through ancient documents in an archive or spending hours searching online databases. We definitely spend a lot of time researching, but we also spend much of our time writing. Writing is the backbone of genealogy work. As professionals, we write research reports; we write letters to clients; we write genealogical articles; we write letters to archivists and to fellow researchers; we write proposals for presentations; we write handouts to give out at lectures. Good writing is a crucial skill for a successful genealogist.

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### Writing Resources

Do not worry! You will receive help and practice in your writing as you work through the FHGEN program at BYUI. Your teachers will show you how to write better and will answer questions for you. They will teach you how to write like a professional genealogist. They will show you how to better write research reports, articles, compiled lineages, proof arguments, and other genealogical writings.

You can also receive assistance from online sources. Part II of [The Chicago Manual of Style]( https://www-chicagomanualofstyle-org.pathway.idm.oclc.org/book/ed18/part3/ch14/toc.html)contains help with style. If you have a general writing question or one about academic writing style, you can often find the answer in The Chicago Manual of Style. You can also find answers The [Purdue University Online Writing Lab](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html) also has an extensive collection of articles about academic writing that can be helpful.

We discussed how you can find more information about writing styles in your country in Chapter 3.

If you need help with grammar and punctuation, organization, writing clearly, or with general writing questions, the [BYU-Pathway Writing Lessons and Help]( https://resourcecenter.byupathway.edu/writing) is an excellent resource.

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### Professional Emails

Genealogists also have to write well to express themselves professionally in their correspondence. Professionalism in correspondence shows your clients and fellow researchers that you are capable and have high standards. Most genealogists and institutions communicate via email, so the ability to construct a professionally-written email is imperative.

#### Contents

A professional email will contain the following:

* A subject line that concisely expresses the subject of the email
* A greeting (for example, "Mr. Smith")
* A concise message that is free of errors, emoticons (emotion icon), and fancy fonts
* A closing that includes your first and last name

In an online world, your email is usually the first contact you have with someone. You need to take the time to make sure that it shows you to your best advantage. You should **not** send an email that is any of the following:

* Incomplete
* Unclear
* Has not been proofread
* Rude (**NOTE**: If you are asking someone for a favor, you should always be respectful and use the word "please.")

#### Etiquette

You should also follow the correct email etiquette. The first rule of good email etiquette is to respond in a timely manner. What constitutes a timely manner depends on the institution, but keeping within a 24-hour response time is a good rule of thumb. Ignoring emails is considered rude and unprofessional.

#### Tone and Language

When communicating through writing professional emails or any other type of written communication, you will also want to consider your tone and language. Ask yourself the following questions to review the tone and language of your email before sending it:

* Does your email sound impatient? Frustrated? Happy? Angry?
* Are you using professional words and avoiding slang?

Take a few minutes now to read more about email etiquette in the BYUI publication “Email Etiquette for Professionals: 19 Essential Ground Rules.”

### **Email Etiquette for Professionals: 19 Essential Ground Rules**

1. Keep emails short. Shorter is better.
2. Don't use fancy formatting (fonts, backgrounds, emoticons, and so on). Not only can they be annoying to others, many email systems don’t read special formatting.
3. Don't use abbreviations, especially those commonly used in text messaging (such as "r u there?").
4. Use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
5. Always proofread your message before sending it.
6. Don’t forward chain letters. Not only do they waste time and resources, but they are also irritating and put people in an awkward position (such as “send this back if you love me”).
7. Respect other people’s privacy. Use “bcc” (blind copy) when sending out an email to multiple recipients. Also, when forwarding messages, be sure to delete the names and email addresses of others which are sometimes present in the body of your message.
8. Don’t shout. Using all caps is the equivalent of shouting and is likely to be interpreted as indicating that you are either unsophisticated or angry.
9. Excessive use of exclamation marks is inappropriate. One exclamation mark, where appropriate, is plenty.
10. Don’t flame, overreact, or send a response to a message too quickly and without sufficient thought. If you find yourself feeling angry, save your response in a “Draft” file and leave it there for at least 24 hours before sending it.
11. Recognize that not everyone wants to receive everything you find funny. Don’t continue to send material if people never acknowledge, express thanks, or reciprocate.
12. Answer email in a timely and efficient manner. Responding within 24 hours is a good “rule of thumb.”
13. Don’t request read receipts (a confirmation that the email was opened). This will almost always annoy your recipient before he or she has even read your message.
14. Don’t ask to recall a message. Chances are that your message has already been delivered and read. It is better to simply send an email to say that you have made a mistake.
15. Don’t use email to discuss confidential information. Sending an email is like sending a postcard. If you don't want your email to be displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it.
16. Don’t conduct disciplinary action via email. This should be done “in-person.”
17. Be mindful of your tone. Unlike face-to-face meetings or even phone calls, those who read your email messages don’t have the benefit of your pitch, tone, inflection, or other non-verbal cues. As a result, you need to be careful about your tone.
18. Remember, company email isn’t private. Anyone with sufficient authority or access can monitor your conversations on company-owned servers.
19. Remember, too, email messages live forever. They are easily (and frequently) forwarded and can create a firestorm of conflict if you are not careful.

References:

Diana Robinson, “The Top 10 Email Courtesy Suggestions”

Emailreplies.com, “Email Etiquette”

Michael Hyatt, “Email Etiquette 101” fullfocus.co

Parlay International, “Six Ways to Improve Your Email Messages” www.parlay.com.  David Shipley and Will Schwalbe,

Send: Why People Email so Badly and How to do it Better

(Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010).

Please practice writing professional emails and using professional email etiquette during your time taking FHGEN courses. By the time you start working professionally, your emails will reflect your increased professionalism.

## Professional Genealogical Organizations

### Study Questions

SQ: Which organizations award professional genealogical credentials?  
SQ: What would be the benefit of earning a professional genealogical credential?  
SQ: Which organizations could you join if you wanted support in the professional field of genealogy?  
SQ: How do organizations’ codes of ethics align with the GPS?

There are many organizations that support and strengthen the professional field of genealogy. You will become familiar with four of those institutions. They are organized into two categories:

1. Credentialing organizations
2. Professional support organizations

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### Credentialing Organizations

When you have completed your education, you will have a certificate or degree. You may wish to then become credentialed. Credentialing means that you have completed a rigorous process designed by a genealogical organization and are then ‘certified’ or ‘accredited’ by that organization. Credentialing is beneficial because it will give you more confidence as a professional genealogist in a variety of circumstances. It also gives clients confidence in you.

To determine if an organization offers credentials, you can explore the organizations. This will also help you know what is required to receive the credential they offer.

There are two main credentialing organizations in the United States that award credentials to applicants living anywhere in the world who pass the rigorous testing of these organizations.\* These two credentialing organizations are the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) and the International Commission for The Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (ICAPGen). To learn more about these organizations, read the following **(optional)**:

* [About BCG](https://bcgcertification.org/about/)
* [About ICAPGen](https://www.icapgen.org/about/)

The [Council for the Advancement of Forensic Genealogy (CAFG)](https://www.forensicgenealogists.org/) offers a credential in forensic genealogy, and the BCG offers an additional certification for genetic genealogy.

\*It is not required that you live in the United States to seek credentials from either the BCG or ICAPGen, but you must currently appear in person in Salt Lake City, Utah, United States to complete written and oral exams for earning the credential from ICAPGen. This may change in the future; check the ICAPGen website for details.

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### Other Professional Organizations

Other organizations that are not credentialing organizations, but support and strengthen the professional field of genealogy, are numerous and located throughout the world. Two of these organizations that are based in the United States (but support genealogists throughout the world) are the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) and the National Genealogical Society (NGS). While not required for the course, if you wish to learn more about these organizations, you may use the following links:

* Association of Professional Genealogists: [About Us](https://www.apgen.org/about_us.php)
* National Genealogical Society: [Interested in Family History?](https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/family-history/)

Here are a few more organizations. You may wish to see if there is a genealogical organization near you.

* [(UK) Register of Qualified Genealogists (RQG)](https://www.qualifiedgenealogists.org/)
* [Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG)](https://www.sag.org.au/)
* [Council for the Advancement of Forensic Genealogy (CAFG)](https://www.forensicgenealogists.org/)
* [The Association of Scottish Genealogists and Researchers in Archives](https://www.asgra.co.uk/index.php)
* [(UK) The Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives](https://www.agra.org.uk/)
* [(Quebec) Bureau québécois d'attestation de compétence en généalogie (BQACG)](https://www.federationgenealogie.com/fr/code-ethique)
* [Australasian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents (AAGRA)](https://www.aagra.asn.au/aagra-code-of-ethics/)

### Tips for International Students

You can locate genealogical organizations in your country by searching the internet using terms like “genealogical organizations in Philippines” or “genealogical societies in China” to find organizations in your country. Explore the results. You might try asking other people who have worked or completed research in your country. The [FamilySearch Wiki](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page) has a page for finding [genealogical groups in different countries](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/FamilySearch_Genealogy_Research_Groups). Many of these groups are social media groups. Find a group for your country and ask which genealogical journals and reference books from your country can help you learn good writing skills.

The [FamilySearch Wiki](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page) also provides information about different countries. Enter the name of your country in the search bar and explore the results.

## Careers

### Study questions

SQ: What are some alternative careers available to those with genealogical degrees? Which are of interest to you?SQ: What other education might be required for these alternate careers?

A degree in family history can prepare you for various career paths. The most common career choice is a professional genealogical researcher—either one who works for a company or who is self-employed. On behalf of clients, professional genealogists conduct thorough research on multiple sources including census records, vital records, immigration records, and other historical documents. Therefore, they must possess outstanding research skills and prepare methodical and logical research projects. Professional genealogists follow the Genealogical Proof Standard at all times. Successful researchers also have well-developed technical skills. These skills may include using genealogy software programs, accessing and searching online record collections, and organizing their findings. Individuals who choose to be self-employed also will need business skills including marketing, sales, client relations, billing, and accounting.

Becoming a professional genealogist is one of several career paths in family history and genealogy. Other options exist, and as you read the brief job descriptions below, consider the requirements for each job type. Do any of these careers interest you?

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#### Project Manager

Project managers manage research projects from start to finish. This includes scheduling, budgeting, and overseeing project teams. The project manager acts as a liaison between clients and company team members. The project manager provides initial client consultations to assess what clients already know. They help clients identify their research objectives, coordinate the work with team members, manage each project to ensure the work meets the client goals while remaining on time and within budget, resolve client concerns to the satisfaction of the client and the company, and encourage clients to order additional research. Job requirements can include the following:

* A degree in family history, history, journalism, or communications
* Experience in genealogical research, project management, or a related field
* Excellent written and verbal communication skills

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#### Editor

Editors edit family trees, family group records, and research reports for content. They ensure that all written information is accurate and consistent, and meets company quality standards. Editors must have excellent writing and editing skills, including grammar, punctuation, style, and copyediting. Job requirements usually include the following:

* A degree in family history, history, journalism, or communications
* Excellent writing and proofreading/editing skills
* Document management skills

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#### Historian

Historians locate, analyze, and interpret historical records, record sources, and data. Historians conduct research online and in-person in archives. Historians work with state historic preservation offices, state departments of transportation, and other federal agencies. Job requirements often include the following:

* A degree in history, architectural history, historic preservation, or family history
* Strong research, analytical, and writing skills
* Experience identifying, evaluating, and interpreting primary and secondary sources
* Familiarity with local and national cultural resource preservation laws, guidelines, practices, and procedures

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#### Historical Society Administrator

Historical society administrators manage the operations of a historical society or museum. They also oversee communications, programs, and fundraising. Job requirements commonly include the following:

* A degree in history, public history, museum studies, or family history
* Experience securing funding for organizations through grants, donations, and fundraising events
* Experience managing people and budgets
* Competence with database software, website design, and social media presence to manage and promote the organization’s collection and programs

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#### Archivist

Archivists organize acquisitions, including historical documents, to ensure they are accurately cataloged, preserved, and made available to researchers. Also, archivists evaluate historical documents to determine their authenticity. Job requirements may include the following:

* A degree in history, library science, archival science, or family history
* A basic understanding of preservation and conservation techniques to ensure the long-term preservation of archival materials
* Strong technical skills in managing and organizing digital and physical collections
* Familiarity with databases and their use

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#### Genealogical Software Developer

Genealogical software developers design and implement software for genealogical purposes. They understand genealogy concepts and data formats, and have strong programming skills. Job requirements often include the following:

* A degree in computer science and software engineering
* Strong family history knowledge
* Programming skills in Java, Python, or Go
* The ability to comprehend and solve complex technical problems
* Familiarity with database design and management

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#### Heir Researcher

An heir researcher locates heirs or beneficiaries of estates, property, or other assets when no next-of-kin is apparent. Heir researchers specialize in asset recovery using research and investigation to uncover unclaimed or otherwise lost estate assets and to identify heirs. Job requirements typically include the following:

* A degree in history, architectural history, historic preservation, or family history research
* Experience identifying living people in census records, vital records, cemetery records, obituaries, property titles, probate research, ancestry archives, county records, court proceedings, and skip-tracing databases
* An understanding of probate documents and probate law
* An ability to navigate the legal system effectively

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#### Forensic Genetic Genealogist

In the twenty-first century, genealogical research using DNA has exploded and resulted in new careers involving genetics. Forensic genetic genealogists identify biological parents and other relatives. They also work with unidentified remains and/or DNA from crime scene investigations. Genetic genealogists must be able to analyze DNA data and interpret complex family relationships accurately. Job requirements usually include the following:

* A degree in biology or genetics
* Strong family history research skills
* An ability to communicate and present investigative research clearly and logically through reports, diagrams, and charts
* An understanding of the legal regulations involved with DNA data and usage

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#### Private Investigator

Private investigators perform investigations, heir searches, and background checks. They locate subjects who attempt to evade process servers. Private Investigators must have a strong understanding of the law, including privacy laws and rules related to evidence gathering. Job requirements may include the following:

* A degree in history or family history research
* Good analytical and problem-solving capabilities
* Strong online research skills
* A private investigator’s license

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#### Genealogical Talk Show Host

Genealogical talk show hosts engage guests to convey information effectively. Talk show hosts research guests, topics, and genealogy trends to prepare for interviews. Job requirements can include the following:

* A degree in broadcast, journalism, communication, or family history research
* Familiarity with audio and video equipment
* Skills for building relationships with genealogists, researchers, and industry professionals

References for Careers Section:

Elizabeth Kelley Kerstens, "Alternative Careers" Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians, edited by Elizabeth Shown Mills, (Genealogical Publishing, 2008)  [141]-160.

"Other Genealogical Jobs (National Institute)," FamilySearch ([www.familysearch.or](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Other_Genealogical_Jobs_(National_Institute))g : 3 November 2014).

"LinkedIn," LinkedIn: Log In or Sign Up, ([www.linkedin.com/feed](https://www.linkedin.com/feed/) :  accessed 28 March 2023).

Read this online at <https://books.byui.edu/fhgen_110_textbook_/chapter_6_high_research_standards_in_professional_research>