

## Quick Tips

### Why use reason statements when making changes or additions to Family Tree?

Family Tree allows individuals to work together to build a family tree. Descendants from various branches of a family often have different family photographs, documents, memories and unique information. When descendants work together to find new information, their collective knowledge becomes more powerful. They can learn more than they might have found on their own and can save time by leaving notes and documenting sources.



Because Family Tree is a collaborative effort, we need to be courteous in our use of it. That means we have a responsibility to be cautious when we add information and make changes. We communicate this by adding reason statements. There are no set right or wrong way to write reason statements, but some are obviously better than others. Not everyone agrees on exactly what a reason statement should include but keep in mind the purpose: reason statements communicate to others why “you are messing with their family.” Many people complain about Family Tree being a collaborative effort, but collaboration isn’t the problem- it’s the unexplained changes and additions that cause frustrations.

Remember, reason statements are not just for other users. Write enough information so you can remember why you made the change or added the source. As you work on Family Tree, you will make so many decisions that it is impossible to remember them all. So, when you look at the decision you made later, you can remember why you added that source or changed that fact.

A *FamilySearch Help Center* article includes tips for effective reason statements. Here are a few. My additional comments are in italics.

- Use complete sentences. *As a retired teacher I am sometimes dismayed at the shorthand written language that many now use. My grandchildren laugh at me when I write in complete sentences, with periods, when I text them. I believe writing in complete sentences makes it easier for others to understand.*
- Avoid “I” statements. Instead, write in the third person (such as “The census shows....”).
- Don’t use reason statement boxes to debate with relatives. The reason statements are not the place to hold a dialogue or debate with other users. Use the Collaborate field to add a note or Discussion.
- Explain facts that conflict. If the records contain contradictory or incorrect information, explain why you think one version is the most correct.
- Keep your tone professional and neutral.
- If you derived or estimated information, explain how you reached your conclusion. *For example- The father’s birth date is estimated from the birth record of his oldest child.*
- Be concise. *If you need a longer explanation, make sure you divide it into paragraphs. A long narrative with no breaks doesn't invite readers. I guess this is another one of my teacher notions.*

For more information:

[How to Contact Other Users—Working Together on the Family Tree](#)

[What are reason statements in Family Tree?](#)

Cheryl Fugal, September 2022