

## The Do's and Don'ts of Genealogy Research

When it comes to genealogy research, there are a number of dos and don'ts you should keep in mind in order to guarantee the best results.

### Do: Take the Time to Talk to Living Relatives

One common mistake many people make when doing genealogy research is forgetting to talk to those relatives that are still living. It is easy to get caught up in all of the researching and sorting through old records with the intent of catching up with living relatives later, only to discover that later never comes.

Genealogy research is very interesting and it is fun to learn more about your past relatives. Don't forget that your living relatives have many wonderful anecdotes as well. In addition, they have a great deal of insight to add to your research. For this reason, talking to your living relatives should be one of your top priorities.

If it is impossible for you to personally visit with a living relative, you might want to consider sending a memory book to the relative and asking him or her to fill the book with stories. Not only will this help you gain valuable insight, it can also make a marvelous memento.

### Don't: Trust Everything You Read

Remember: just because it is in print, it doesn't mean it is true. In fact, it is actually quite easy to publish information. This is particularly true when it comes to researchers publishing information they have uncovered while exploring the mysteries of genealogy. Never assume this information is accurate. Instead, use it as a jumping block toward completing your own research.

Keep in mind that most printed histories do contain at least one or two small errors. Census, will, cemetery, and courthouse transcriptions may also contain errors such as missing information or make their own incorrect assumptions. The same holds true for printed information on the Internet.

### Do: Avoid Blanket Family Histories

There are many companies out there that are willing to provide you with "everything you need to know" about your family surname. These generic family histories are not an accurate portrayal of your actual lineage. In addition, they are not very detailed or complete. In fact, most of these supposed family histories only offer a few paragraphs of information about the origin of the surname. In most cases, there are several different origins for a surname, with their being no guarantee that it is about your specific family.

Many of these companies also provide you with the coat of arms that is supposed to be related to your family. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that this coat of arms is related to your family because they were usually provided to specific people rather than to a surname. These companies also typically provide you with a list of other people with the same surname as you - information you can gather yourself by simply looking through phone books on the Internet.

### Don't: Get Caught Up in Your Hopes

It is common to want to believe that you are related to some famous person from the past. In fact, many people begin genealogy research in the first place because they are hoping to find a family connection with a famous person with the same last name. Therefore, it is important to be honest and open-minded when performing research rather than sway the evidence in the direction you are hoping to go. In addition, resist the temptation to start with the famous person and trace him or her back to you. Rather, start with yourself and see where the research leads you.

### Do: Document Your Sources

Every source you use should be documented. This makes it easier for you to cross-reference your findings while also adding clout to your research. Properly documenting your sources includes writing down the location of the document, as well as the name of the source and the date you retrieved it.

### Don't: Use Just One Surname Spelling

Limiting yourself to just one surname spelling can cause you to miss out on a great deal of information. Remember that your ancestors may have gone by a number of different spellings. These spellings are commonly found in official records as well. In fact, names were commonly misspelled on accident or purposely changed in order to better fit within a certain culture or to make it easier to remember. Develop a list of possible variations in spelling of your name and go from there when doing research.

By keeping this list of dos and don'ts in mind when performing genealogy research, you will be more likely to successfully trace back the branches on your family tree - and have a great time doing it!

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