

# Ancestry.com: How to-do's and what'll you finds

Founded in 1983, Ancestry.com has become one of the largest genealogical subscription resources for American family historians. The company provides a database of census records, religious records, user-uploaded material, and a DNA service. The database comes in various forms:

1. U.S. Discovery
2. World Explorer
3. All Access
4. Ancestry.com Library Edition (free with library card, only accessible at the library)
5. Ancestry collections focused on a specific country

Ancestry.com also owns: Fold3.com (a military database), Newspapers.com (digitized historic newspapers), and FindAGrave.com (free online website for gravesites). Look for special packages combining subscriptions to some or all of these.

## General Guidelines for Organizing Research to Move Forward

Ancestry.com is not the best place to keep all of your records

- #1 rule: Make sure all of your information is backed up!
  - On home computer
  - Binders
  - External hard drives
  - Acid-free boxes/folders for original materials
- Can be a place to keep your records through the member's family trees

Here's a tip:  
When using the Ancestry.com family tree feature, break up your family tree into multiple trees! It becomes much easier to manage.

Ancestry.com **does not** have all of the records

- You may have to dig deeper into Ancestry.com to find the records you are looking for
  - Check the card catalog, digitized books, collections that are "browse only"
- They may only have the abstract or transcription
- If it is not on Ancestry.com, try FamilySearch.org

Remain in control of your research and go in with a plan

- Figure out who you want to research and stay with them
- Create a research log
- Track different spelling variations and what different results come up with different filters on
- Make sure you are following the correct person!

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## Organize your research

- Ask your family members
- Sort what information you already have
- Family tree charts/pedigree charts, family group sheets, research logs, timelines
- Write down keywords (i.e. surnames, locations) that you know are accurate and that will keep you on track

## Do your research about the website

- Read the About section of the website and explore what they will and will not provide
- Understand how their search engines work and how they are cataloged
- Question the content of the website.
  - When was it last updated?
  - What wildcards or search strategies are available on their website?
  - Find the collection descriptions!

You need to view the actual document before you accept that it is connected to your search [important if you are applying for a lineage society]

- Primary vs. Secondary Source?
- Database vs. Digital Collection?
- Abstract/Transcription (partial) vs. File/Document? (full)

## What Likely Will Not Be on Ancestry.com

Birth, Marriage and Death Records for most states

- May be citations only

Most court files

Family and Local History Books still under copyright

With every document or abstract you find on Ancestry.com, consider what institutions hold that document and what they may also have pertaining to that ancestor.

**Remember:** not everything is online!

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## AncestryDNA: What to Expect

AncestryDNA was launched to the public in 2012. It is one of the top used commercial testing companies within the United States. Test takers do not need to have an Ancestry account in order to take the test.



- The test will look at a small portion of your DNA covering both the maternal and paternal lines (not all tests do this).
- The DNA results can be downloaded to your computer and then uploaded to other testing sites, such as MyHeritage and Family Tree DNA
- Matches with relatives can provide additional information to fill out the family tree BUT will not create the family tree for you
- Ethnicity estimates change/update approximately three times a year, so it is worth checking out
- Genetic communities provide geographic markers within the ethnicity estimates and will link relatives connected to those same communities
- Stronger in European-American genetic testing, weaker in non-European ancestry.

## Top 5 Things to Try

1. Ancestor search
2. Card Catalog
3. Ancestry Academy (under the Extras heading)
4. Message Boards (under the Help heading)
5. Public Family Trees

<u>Ancestor Searched</u>	<u>Collection Searched</u>	<u>Results</u>

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## Search Tips When You're Getting Stuck

- Search phonetically
- Read descriptions of the collections to make sure they will include your search criteria
- Search within individual collections and do a search across the database
- Try not filling in each box in one search; try variations
- Search by location
- Continue checking back over time to see what has been added to the database
- Double check to verify what information you have in your collection
- Use wildcards, which opens up options for spelling variations
  - \* represents 0 to 5 characters and will pull up any words that start or end with those letters.
  - ? will replace 1 character within the word

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