

# Building Your Genealogical Skills

## Session 1: Basics

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### Methodology

Step #1- Identify what you know

Step#2- Decide what you want to learn (research goal)

Step#3- Identify and locate your sources

Step#4- Research!

Step#5- Analyze

*\*Repeat steps as needed*

Rule # 1: Work from the Known to the Unknown

### Step #1- Identify what you know

Starting your genealogical documentation is as simple as purchasing a spiral bound notebook for your notes, but several standard forms greatly simplify the task of recording important genealogical information. Most genealogical software programs will generate reports in these basic formats. Plan to make liberal use of these forms.

#### Tools

- Pedigree Chart: Road map of your ancestors and includes basic information about each person such as full name, date and place of birth, death, and marriage. Each person on the chart receives a number.
- Family Group Sheet: The family group sheet provides a snapshot of each nuclear family and records pertinent information about each family member.

#### Techniques

1. Interview Questions: Interviewing your relatives may seem like a daunting task.
2. Genealogical Recording Standards:
  - Names
    - Write surnames in all CAPITAL LETTERS
    - Record a woman using her maiden name
    - When a maiden name is unknown use MNU/--?--/just the given name \_\_\_\_\_

- Dates
  - Record dates as DAY-MONTH-YEAR (ex: 16 January 2016)
  - **DO NOT** use slash marks or two-digit years (ex: 1/16/2016 or 1/16/2016)
- Places
  - Note smallest to largest geographic division (ex: Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts)
  - For outside the U.S.: townland/parish, county, country
  - Be sure to identify counties
  - **DO NOT** use postal abbreviations (ex: Massachusetts, **NOT** MA or Mass)

## Step #2- Decide what you want to learn

Once you created a five-generation chart or a family group sheet (you may have gathered this known information from an interview, family papers, photographs, or a family bible) you must then determine what information is lacking.

1. Are there missing dates or locations?
2. How about missing names? Are parents missing? Maiden names?
3. Next, determine what individuals or families intrigue you the most? It's best to tackle one line at a time.
4. Create a list of questions or objectives to research.

### Tools

- Research Plan: Your roadmap for research – your hypotheses, research objectives and where you will search.
  - Goal: What do you want to know?
  - Known Facts: What do you already know?
  - Working Hypothesis: What do you think the answer is? OR What is the time period and location that has the answer?
  - Sources: Which records might hold the answer? Do those records exist for my location?
  - Search Strategy: Which repositories have the sources and in what order should I search?

### Tips

1. **Start slowly.** Don't rush to answer all your questions at once.
2. **Don't skip generations** in planning your research; it only leads to misattributed people.

## Step #3- Identify and Locate Your Sources

### Tools

The internet and the library provide the most accessible sources of information about family history, although not everything is online or in a book. An efficient use of the internet or the library rests on understanding where the information you seek may be found.

#### 1. Genealogical Records

- Vital Records
- Church and cemetery records
- Bible records
- Census
- City Directories
- Immigration and Emigration Records
- Naturalization and Citizenship Records
- Land and Property
- Probate
- Taxation
- Military
- Newspapers

#### 2. Other Sources of Genealogical Information

- Compiled genealogies
- Local histories
- Biographies
- How-to Guides and Similar Resources
- Digitized Books:
  - <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
  - <https://books.google.com/>
  - <https://archive.org/index.php>
  - <https://openlibrary.org/>
  - <https://books.familysearch.org>
  - <http://library.si.edu/digital-library>

#### 3. Guidebooks:

- Rhonda R. McClure, ed., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: NEHGS, 2021)
- *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2004)
- *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2006)
- *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*, 1st ed. (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2015)

## Step #4- Research

1. Begin answering your questions
2. Consult multiple sources
3. Gather as many records about a family or individual that you can find
4. Track your work.

### Tools

- Research Log: Research logs are an excellent way to keep track of the research you have already completed. They contain a list of every source you consulted—and whether your search was successful or not.
- Capture:
  - Date of search
  - Source searched
  - Search objective
  - Search string
  - Results of search

## Step #5- Analyze

1. Don't just read, examine
  - Records – Contain one or more pieces of genealogical information
  - Sources – Contain multiple records
2. Sources
  - Is it the original or a copy?
  - When was the source created (original source rather than the electronic database source)?
  - Who created the source?
  - What formulas were used in creating the source?
3. Records
  - When was the record created?
  - Who created the record?
  - Who provided the information?

## Resource List

### Genealogy Forms

*New England Historical Genealogy Society* - Pedigree chart, Family Group sheet, Research Log, Family Interview Question, Census Comparison charts: <https://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/download>

*National Archives* - Census and other useful forms: <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/charts-forms>

*Midwest Genealogy Center* - The usual forms, plus two unique research check lists; print multiples and file with each individual:

<http://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy/family-history-forms>

[https://www.mymcpl.org/uploaded\\_resources/MGC-researchchecklist.pdf](https://www.mymcpl.org/uploaded_resources/MGC-researchchecklist.pdf)

*Ancestry.com* - My go-to for blank census forms <http://www.ancestry.com/cs/census-forms>

### Skills

Robert Charles Anderson *Elements of Genealogical Analysis* (Boston, Massachusetts: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014).

Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof* (Arlington, Va. : National Genealogical Society, 2013).

Penelope L. Stratton and Henry B. Hoff, *Guide to Genealogical Writing* (Boston, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014).

Drew Smith, *Organize Your Genealogy*, (Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2016).

Blaine T. Bettinger, *Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy*, (Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2016).

### Localities

Eichholz, Alice, editor. *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*. Revised Edition. Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1992.

Loretto Dennis Szucs & Sandra Hargreaves Luebking. *The source: a guidebook to American genealogy* (Provo, UT: Ancestry, 2006).

Rhonda R. McClure, *Genealogist's handbook for New England Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2022).

Marie E. Daly and Judith Lucey, *Genealogist's Handbook for Irish Research*, (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2016).

James M. Beidler, *Trace your German roots online* (Cincinnati, Ohio : Family Tree Books, 2016).