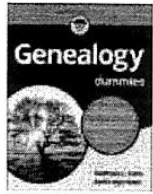


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# PLANNING YOUR GENEALOGY RESEARCH



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## Genealogy For Dummies, 8th Edition

By **April Leigh Helm, Matthew L. Helm**

Your computer puts the world at your fingertips. Discovering all the wonderful online genealogy resources that exist makes you feel like a kid in a candy store. You click around from site to site with wide eyes, amazed by what you see, tempted to record everything for your genealogy — whether it relates to one of your family lines or not.

Because of the immense wealth of information available to you, putting together a research plan before going online is very important — it can save you a lot of time and frustration by keeping you focused. Millions of pages with genealogical content exist on the Internet. If you don't have a good idea of exactly what you're looking for to fill in the blanks in your family history, you can get lost online. Getting lost is even easier when you see a name that looks familiar and start following its links, only to discover hours later (when you finally get around to pulling out the notes you already had) that you've been tracking the wrong person and family line.

You're probably wondering exactly what a research plan is. Basically, a *research plan* is a commonsense approach to looking for information about your ancestors online. A research plan entails knowing what you're looking for and what your priorities are for finding information.

If you're the kind of person who likes detailed organization (such as lists and steps), you can map out your research plan in a spreadsheet or word processor on your computer, write it on paper, or use a genealogical software tool. If you're the kind of person who knows exactly what you want and need at all times, and you have an excellent memory of where you leave off when doing projects, your research plan can exist solely in your mind. In other words, your research plan can be as formal or informal as you like — as long as it helps you plot what you're looking for.

For example, say that you're interested in finding some information on your great-grandmother. Here are some steps you can take to form a research plan:

- 1 Write down what you already know about the person you want to research — in this case, your great-grandmother.**

Include details such as the dates and places of birth, marriage, and death; spouse's name; children's names; and any other details you think may help you distinguish your ancestor from other individuals. Of course, it's possible that all you know at this time is Great-grandma's name.

- 2 Survey a comprehensive genealogical index to get an overview of what's available.**

Visit a site such as **Linkpendium** to browse for information by name and location. Using Great-grandma's name and the names of some of the locations where she lived will allow you to see what kinds of resources are available. Make sure that you make a list of the sites that you find in a word processor document, in a spreadsheet, or on a piece of paper; bookmark them on your web browser; or record them in your genealogical application. Also, given that websites come and go frequently, you may want to consider downloading the web page for future offline browsing. Most web browsers allow you to download a web page by selecting **Save As** from the **File** menu at the top, and then providing the path to the file where you want to save a copy.

- 3 Prioritize the resources that you want to use.**

Browsing a comprehensive genealogical index may turn up several types of resources, such as sites featuring digitized copies of original records, transcriptions of records, online genealogy databases, or an online message board with many posts about people with the same last name. Prioritize which resources you plan to use first. You may want to visit a website that contains specific information on your grandmother's family first — rather than spending a lot of time on a website that just contains generic information on her surname. You may also want to visit a site with digitized original records first and leave a site with transcribed records or a database for later use.

- 4 Schedule time to use the various resources that you identify.**

Family history is truly a lifelong pursuit — you can't download every bit of information and documentation that you need all at once. Because researching your genealogy requires time and effort, we recommend that you schedule time to work on specific parts of your research. If you have a particular evening open every week, you can pencil in a research night on your calendar, setting aside 15–30 minutes at the beginning to review what you have and assess your goals, then spending a couple of hours researching, and ending your evening with another 15–30 minutes of review in which you organize what you found.