



Five Steps to a Successful Family History Project

1. Collect and record existing family history

- Write down what you already know: names, dates, places, relationships, etc.
- Talk to relatives: record their stories, ask them to identify people in images
- Collect or locate family history documents, photographs, and mementos
- Organize your files now to save yourself from a headache later
- Identify the gaps in your family history

Tools: family group sheet, ancestor chart, digital audio recorder, scanner/camera

2. Decide what you want to learn

- Start a list of goals and questions
- Pick the most intriguing (or urgent) goal or question
- Consider your personal interests

3. Research and contextualize your ancestors

- Look to libraries, genealogy societies, and history-focused organizations for help
- Research online and in person; take notes and record your sources
- Look beyond names and dates: consider the context of your ancestors' lives

At Ela: websites, databases, books, magazines, audio recorder, classes, newsletter, & more

4. Organize and share your research

- Compile and clean up your research files
- Use your research to create a family history project: book, website, cookbook, film, etc.
- Celebrate your family history through a hobby, trip, reunion, etc.
- Share with family, friends, and others interested in genealogy

5. Begin again!

- Return to your list of goals and questions and pick a new one to work on



ELA
AREA
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275 Mohawk Trail
Lake Zurich, Illinois 60047
(847) 438-3433

Find more genealogy services,
programs, and resources at
www.eapl.org

Genealogy Research Strategies

How to get started

- Use reliable sources and verify the facts with additional sources documentation
- Start with census records: each census is a snapshot of your ancestor's life
- Don't skip generations: build a sturdy family tree and confirm each branch
- Take notes and record your sources; organize your research as you go
- Adjust your goal or question as needed; be open to new and unexpected paths

Search strategies

- Less is more when it comes to searching: keep your first search simple, then add details
- Look at the original records when possible: you may find more than you expected
- More is better when it comes to records: abundant records benefit your research
- Don't forget alternative spellings for names: spelling was fluid until the 20th century

Adding context

- Fill out the picture: what life was like in a time/place; what major events happened
- Consider the impact of gender, race, and class: how did these factors affect their life?
- Incorporate your interests and hobbies into your research

Finding a way around brick walls

- Ask for help from relatives and experts
- Look for close relatives in order to track your ancestor or their family
- Double-check your research and the reliability of your sources
- Wait for new records to be added to online databases or published sources
- Learn about the experiences of people like your ancestor