

Getting Started Part 5: Searching Smarter: Making the Most of Your Time and Resources

BYU Beginners Track
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This session will teach you how to search efficiently so that you can find the information you're looking for quickly and effectively. It will cover strategies for using genealogical databases as well as libraries and archives.

1. Determining a research goal
2. Identifying records
3. Searching records
4. Finding record alternatives

Determining a research goal

1. *What information do I already know?* Family history research begins with establishing what information is known. Typically, this would include surveying compiled sources and any original documents that have already been preserved or collected.
2. *What information is missing?* After establishing the known information, we can see what important vital information or generational connections are missing.
3. *What information do I want to know?* Picking one “mystery” to research can help focus research time and lead to demonstrable results.

Identifying the records

1. *Which record types match my research goal?* There are many types of records with genealogical information, but not all records contain the same information. We can prioritize which records to search by comparing the information recorded with our research goal.
2. *Does this record type exist for my research?* Significant variation exists for when, where, and how vital information is recorded. Doing a basic check to see if the records exist for the time and place we need will save us time.

3. *How can I access these records?* Once we have established that the records we need exist, we need to know how we can find them. For example, are the records available online? Have they been indexed? If not digitized, are they available in a library or archive?

Searching the records

1. *Online database with index:* Narrow your search down by searching in a specific record set. Use your best practices for using search engines.
2. *Online database without index:* Use clues from the catalog description or the beginning of the images to start your search, keeping in mind: what type of records am I looking for? When do I expect the record was made?
3. *Physical archives:* Come with as much information as possible to help your search be efficient in accessing the materials.

Finding record alternatives

1. *What to do if I don't find my ancestor in the records?* If our search is unsuccessful, we can employ a number of search strategies: check a broader time period or surrounding places. Try spelling variations. Review the original known information to check our assumptions.
2. *What if the needed record type doesn't exist?* Find an alternative that may give you the information. Research what records are available for the time and place. Review the records you do have for clues about their life that may lead you to other records.
3. *What if I still don't find them?* Move on. Record what you've found (including null results) in your research log. Revisit the research question in the future, as more records become available or indexes improve.

Careful searching is a crucial step in genealogical research. It maximizes your research, provides the foundation for your conclusions, and opens up new areas of research. Mastering this skill will save you time and improve your research outcomes.

The slides for this presentation are available here:

<https://byu.box.com/s/wfsqeolm0kwj1fbxdmz634iblcrcghfn>

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