



5 Online Search Strategies *That Every Genealogist Should Know*

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Every website and database has its own set of tips and tricks. However, there are some strategies that you can use regardless of whether you're using Ancestry, FamilySearch, a county GenWeb site, or your local library's databases. Give these a try and make more discoveries.

1. Search Individual Databases

When you search across multiple databases at once (like when you do a global search on Ancestry or FamilySearch), you'll get the low-hanging fruit, but you're also likely to miss valuable results. Think about what you want to find and then search in specific databases/collections that could offer that information. You might have more search options that can help you narrow your search. Even though you'll have fewer results, they're more likely to be meaningful.

2. Search With More Than a Name

If you're looking for someone with a common name, include other information that will help you identify that person. For example, if you're looking for someone in the census, include an estimated year of birth or a place of birth. For best results, include additional information that should appear on the record. (Don't add a death date if you're looking for a birth record, for example.)

3. Search Without a Name

There are times when you're looking for a person with almost countless spellings of his or her name. If the database you're using allows it, try searching without a name. Instead, use other identifying information that should be in the record. Trying to find him in the 1870 US census? Include the county and state where he should be living, his birth year, and where he was born.

4. Search for Other Names

Looking for a birth record for someone? Leave out that person's name and search by the parents' names if you can. (Bonus: you might turn up previously unknown siblings!) Try the same with death records. It's a good way to find married daughters when you don't know their married name. Also, look for siblings in the census. (It could be hard to identify the correct John Johnson, so try searching instead for his sister Sophronia -- a lot fewer of them to sort through!)

5. Play With Search Options

Does the database you're using allow the use of wildcards, which will let you find alternate spellings? Does it include the apostrophe in names like O'Connell? Does it include the space in names like Mc Dermott or de Moss? If you've searched it one way and didn't find anything, try changing how you're entering the name. It can make a difference!

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Helping family historians
make more discoveries.
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