Genealogy Bargain$

10 Smarter Search Strategies for Genealogy

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Many genealogists begin their research online and are often frustrated with the lack of results. The cause might not be a lack of records at the specific site, but the way you're performing the search! While basic search techniques work on most genealogy sites, you need to power up your search skills to get the most out of niche genealogy websites and uncover those hidden record sets!

☐ **Use search tips for each database.** Ancestry has a set of search tips for each of its databases. Scroll to the bottom of the page and in the **About** section you will find a Search Tips link with helpful information. For the US World War I Draft Cards database at Ancestry, here is a tip: "Men who resided in British territories sometimes listed themselves simply as British citizens without noting their origin in Canada, Australia, Ireland, Jamaica, etc."

☐ **Switch middle and first name.** Even if you are "certain" about an ancestor's name, be open to search variations. Swap the first and middle names. For some Catholic ancestors, the "confirmation" name was often adopted as a first name starting about age 13.

☐ **Are you in the right time period?** The default search for Ancestry is to use the EXACT feature for names, dates and locations. Remember to search "broad" first then drill down to more specific searching.

☐ **OCR is NOT your friend.** Digitized historical newspapers can have an error rate as high as 20%. Review the record image; if the text interprets the letter "a" as "o," change your search criteria. Hyphens and diacritical marks can be problematic; again, review the record image and determine if adding these marks will improve the search.

☐ **Beware address and street name changes.** If you can't find information related to a specific address or street, keep in mind many locales changed street names over time OR instituted a new street numbering grid (like Chicago did in 1909!)

☐ **Use wild card searching.** The asterisk (*****) and question mark (**?**) are the most common wildcards for searching. Use ***** for a range of characters and use **?** for a specific character. Example: Use **M*Entee** to find McEntee and MacEntee and other variations. You could use **M??Entee** but you will only get results for two characters between M and Entee.

☐ **Online genealogy records databases can disappear or be inaccessible!** Don't forget that most record sets on Ancestry and other sites are "licensed" by the repository and access is granted to users of the website. Licenses expire over time and you may not realize it.

☐ **Watch county boundaries!** Many states added or removed counties once added to the Union. You might think you are searching in the right county, but always check to see if that county actually existed for a specific date.

☐ **Spelling and phonetic substitutions.** Many records were created by an official based on what he was told. Many had difficulty understanding foreign languages and how names were written. Substitute different spellings during search attempts as well as different phonetic versions.

☐ **Check the period jargon.** Abbreviated names were used to save space. Example: **Thos.** for **Thomas** and **M'Entee** for **MacEntee**. The terms our ancestors used for occupations and medical conditions might be different than present-day terminology.

Check out the **Smarter Search Strategies Resource List** on the back page!

Smarter Search Strategies Resource List

- *A Beginner's Guide to Searching Records* – FamilySearch
  https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/a-beginners-guide-to-searching-records/

- Ancestry Card Catalog
  https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/catalog/

- ArchiveGrid
  https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/

- Atlas of Historical County Boundaries
  http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/

- FamilySearch Catalog
  https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog

- Glossary of Medical Terms Used in the 18th and 19th Centuries
  https://www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html

- Google Alerts
  https://www.google.com/alerts

- *How to Search Ancestry* – Ancestry
  https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/How-to-Search-Ancestry

- List of Occupation Abbreviations – GenealogyInTime Magazine
  http://www.genealogyintime.com/dictionary/list-of-occupation-abbreviations-page-a.html

- MyHeritage Collection Catalog
  https://www.myheritage.com/research/catalog

- *Record Search Tips: Find Your Family* – FamilySearch
  https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/record-search-tips/

- Spelling Substitution Tables for the United States and Canada – Family Search
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spelling_Substitution_Tables_for_the_United_States_and_Canada

- Street Name Changes
  http://stevemorse.org/census/changes.html

- *What War Did My Ancestor Serve In?* - Ancestry
  https://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2014/04/23/what-war-did-my-ancestor-serve-in/