

The Genealogist's Google Search Methodology

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[Premium Membership](#) and Lisa's book [The Genealogist's Google Toolbox](#)

It's a new decade, so if you think you know how to Google, think again! Technology changes rapidly and keeping our search skills updated and sharp is key to search success.

In this session we'll cover my Google search methodology updated for this year. We will discuss the latest and best search innovations, and you'll learn the process that will dramatically improve your genealogical search results. These skills can be used with all associated Google tools.

Understand the Science Behind Google

- We search the "Surface Web" or the "Visible Web."
- Artificial Intelligence(AI) is now dominating the advances in search.
- "At its core, Search is about understanding language." Pandu Nayak, Google Fellow and Vice President, Search
- 2018: BERT was introduced. The goal: "Search will be able to understand the context of the words in your query. You can search in a way that feels natural for you." This works well for questions, but genealogical queries for data don't fit that mold and require specialized queries.
- Google won't always get it right, particularly with complex or conversational queries. This methodology can dramatically help.
- Google takes your instruction literally, so be clear about what you want.

1. Formulate Your Search Plan

- Identify what you want to find in specific terms.
- Ask yourself, "If I walked into the Family History Library, how would I describe what I am looking for to the librarian?" (Hint: you would provide specific details.)
- Identify what is uncommon about what you seek. Think of keywords (the most important words in your idea or question) that might be associated with the subject. For ancestors consider keywords reflecting location, occupation, an unusual given name of a relative, etc. Build these elements into your search to customize it.

2. Formulate Your Search Query

Decide which search approach best suits your needs:

- A. *Question Search* (best suited for "how to" type information.)

B. *Keyword / Operator Search* (best suited for information on ancestors, records, etc.)

Question searches

These are pretty straight forward. Example: *how to triangulate dna*.

There is no limit to search query length. You can have up to 32 words. Fun fact: Each word is also limited to 128 characters.

Keyword / Operator Searches

Since we can't ask "where are my ancestors?" we need to turn to keyword / operator searches.

Finding the Right Keywords:

- Pull from the unique profile of your ancestor.
- Ask yourself which words are likely to appear on a webpage that has the answer. In other words, how would someone else potentially write about this subject? What terminology would they use?

Start Broad then Go Narrow:

- If you know exactly what you are looking for, be specific.
- If you're researching a new topic or are unsure of what you are looking for, start broad. Narrow your search once you find the most relevant aspects of your search.

Search Operators

Quotation Marks

Use with a "keyword" or "keyword phrase." Words will be in every result, exactly as typed.

OR

Use to give Google options.

Example: "John, Green" OR "Green, John"

Asterisk (*)

Holds the place of a character (initial), keyword, or short keyword phrase.

Example: "Harry * Cooke"

Minus Sign (-)

Removes unwanted words or phrases from search results.

Example: John Lincoln Genoa Nebraska -abraham -president

Numrange (..)

All results will contain a year that falls within the range specified. Example: 1790..1830

3. Analyze Your Results

As with genealogy records and databases, it's important to understand the purpose of the tool that you are using when analyzing the data retrieved.

Google's goals:

- Generate revenue through ads
- Keep users on their platforms
- Provide you with the best possible results so you will keep using Google

Elements of the Results Page

- Sponsored Ad "Results"
- Videos
- Organic Results: Snippets & Rich Snippets
- Featured Snippet (Answer Box)
- Knowledge Graph Panel
- People Also Ask / Similar Searches

What to Look for:

- The source - always click through to verify answers given on the results page
- Outdated information
- Keywords associated with unwanted results

4. Improve Upon Results

Strategies:

- Use the minus sign operator to remove unwanted words and run your search again.
- Use the *Tools* button to reveal the secondary filter menu.
- Experiment with mixing and matching keywords and operators.
- Try variations of your search in different browser tabs to compare results side-by-side.

5. Capitalize on Your Results

Take a great website that you found and use it to search for more like it by using the *RELATED:* search operator. This type of search will return a results list comprised of the websites that most closely match the website you designated.

Example: *RELATED:greatfamilyhistorywebsite.com*

6. Search into the Future: Google Alerts

How to create a Google Alert:

1. Highlight and copy (Control+C) the search query from the Google search box.
2. Go to <https://www.google.com/alerts> and sign in if you aren't already.
3. Paste your search query into the *Search Query* box.
4. Select the result type you desire (Example: *Everything, News, etc.*)

5. Select how often you wish to receive alerts (Example: *Once a Day*)
6. Select how many results you want to receive (Example: *Only the Best Results*)
7. Select the Gmail address associated with your Google account. (If you don't use Gmail, set up a Gmail address for the purposes of receiving alerts. You can forward those emails to your preferred email account.)
8. Click the *CREATE ALERT* button

Resources

The Genealogist's Google Toolbox, 3rd Edition

by Lisa Louise Cooke.

Available exclusively at <https://www.shopgenealogygems.com>

Premium Membership

Includes a full year's exclusive access to:

- all of Lisa's video classes and handouts
- premium podcast
- this presentation on video
- all the [Elevenses with Lisa](#) cheat sheets and archived episodes.

Available at <https://lislouiscooke.com/premium-membership/>

