

A Quick Guide to Google for Genealogy Research

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Note: This guide uses brackets [] to enclose the exact form of an example query.

I. What is a Google Web Search?

- A. A Google Search is a **Query** to the Web (Internet)
Please find web pages that have my Keywords!
Hint: A web page has an address on the internet called a URL
Hint: Google searches many genealogy sites, including USGenWeb
- B. **Keywords** are words, phrases, or logical constructs
For genealogy research this means names, places, events, etc.
- C. The most important constructs:
 - Search for an exact phrase by using **quotation marks**
Searching ["Sonoma County"] finds the county, not the city
 - Search for alternatives by using **OR** (must be capitalized)
Searching ["Santa Rosa" OR "Sonoma County"] brings you
all web pages with EITHER "Santa Rosa" or "Sonoma County"
 - Eliminate websites that aren't relevant by using the **minus sign** just
before a word you want to avoid
Add [-Healdsburg] if you don't want that city
 - Search for words separated slightly by using an **asterisk ***
Search [James * Smith] for web pages with a middle name or initial
 - Search for a numeric sequence (such as dates) by using **...**
Searching [1880...1890] finds web pages with 1880,1881,1882,etc.
- D. Google works well with complex queries
Combining several Keywords, they define what you are seeking

II. Understanding the Search Answers

- A. The basic search brings up a list of web pages
 - The web pages Google thinks fit your query best are listed first
 - Each web page has a snippet so you can see how well it fits
 - If you want to visit it, click on top line (in blue, underlined)
 - When you want to return, click the back arrow in the upper left corner

- B. More about understanding the answer page
If you click on “Cached”, it brings up the original image of the web page
Hint: This can be important for dated items like obituaries
If you click on “Similar pages” it runs a new search for pages like this one
Translate this page: translates the web page if desired
If you can find a web page in German it translates into English
Sponsored links on right are web sites that have paid money
Hint: In genealogy these are often web sites that charge a fee
At the bottom of the page Google may list related searches
Google also allows you to search within the existing search
- C. More to think about in creating a search
In the upper right is “Search Settings”. This lets you change the primary language for your search.
Hint: This can be an important way to get foreign information
When searching for people always search last name first too
Search both [“Frank Sinatra”] and [“Sinatra, Frank”]
Hint: When searching for obituaries, cemeteries, other listings, start with last name first search.

III. Other things you can do with Google web searches

- A. Google has specialized Quick searches. Most of us use:
“Everyday” - Weather, stock quotes, time, sports scores
“Reference tools” - Calculator, authors, earthquakes, conversion tables
“Keywords” - Dictionary, synonyms, spell checker
“Local search” - Restaurants, shops, movies, real estate by zip code
“Trip planning” - Flight status, currency converter, maps
“Search by number” - Package tracking, patents, area codes
- B. Some important quick searches for genealogy
Calendar for any year – [1933 Calendar]
County for any city – [“Santa Rosa” California County]
Telephone listing – [Phonebook: George McKinney Santa Rosa]
- C. Google is a great way to find something you know is on the web. Examples:
Date calculator
County formation maps
Name translation
On-line birth, death records (by US location and foreign country)
On-line marriage, divorce records (by US location and foreign country)
On-line census records (by US location and foreign country)

IV. Other Google Searches

- A. Images (photos)
- B. Videos (includes YouTube)
- C. Books
Hint: Focus on books that allow Full View
- D. Scholar (includes reverse citation analysis)
- E. Search your own computer (requires installation of Google Desktop)
Hint: you may just want the index function
Hint: this retrieves anything you've saved on your computer

V. Google Maps

- A. Google Maps allows several new functions
Enter the address/town you are seeking (US or foreign)
Google retrieves a conventional map view, showing location, roads
It also retrieves:
 - Satellite view (satellite photo)
 - Terrain view (topographical map)
 - Street view (photo of the building, if available)
- B. Google Maps can also locate many geographical features
- C. Google Maps also ties to photographs of each location on the web
- D. Foreign mapping can be quite valuable
Hint: understand modern legal boundaries and language

VI. Google Translate

- A. On the page of answers from Google Web Search you can often use “translate this page” for pages not in English.
- B. There are much greater capabilities in Google Translate
To find Google Translate:
 - click on “more”, then “even more”, then “Translate”
 - 1) Do direct translation into English using the text section
Hint: may be useful in setting up correspondence with a foreign country
Hint: works for text, web pages (use URL), or entire documents
 - 2) Translate between any two languages (typically into English) using the Translated Search section. It shows both languages for each web page side-by-side!

VII. When to Use Google

Google is not the best resource for every genealogy problem. It certainly isn't the only resource and should usually be used in conjunction with other sources.

Google is excellent for:

- Recent events (post-1950)
- Finding a new fact, story, or source that's unexpected
- Books, biographies
- Non-US sources/translation into English
- Getting started on a genealogy problem
- Answering a related query such as what County a City is in

Conventional sources such as Ancestry and FamilySearch are excellent for:

- Vital records, censuses
- Well known facts and sources

VIII. Have Fun with Google

Genealogy research is a process of problem solving. We are constantly trying to find important data with only limited information to start. Google provides many new ways to explore your family. There will always be blind alleys and roadblocks to overcome, and Google won't be able to solve many of them.

The best way to use Google is to learn how to build on your unsuccessful searches on Google and turn many of them into successes by adjusting your Query with different Keywords.

Enjoy the process of learning about your family with Google!

If you're really interested in a full course on this subject, there's a new book with many copies in the Sonoma County Library: "Google Your Family Tree" by Daniel M. Lynch, published in 2008. Call No: 929.1072 LYNCH.