

GS2345-F Proven Methodology for Using Google for Genealogy

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As genealogists we follow a process, so why do we Google so haphazardly? Bring method to the madness of millions of results with this tried and true methodology for using Google for your genealogy research. In this session, we will walk through the process, provide you with the tools, and wow your socks off with real-life examples of Googling success from my book ***The Genealogist's Google Toolbox, Second Edition***. You will leave this class inspired to revisit using Google for your online searches, and armed with the latest strategies to do so successfully. Not everything is online by any stretch, but even offline sources are more efficiently discovered and accessed when you start online. And the fastest and most effective way to locate online data, whether it resides on a university website or the blog of a distant cousin you've never met, is Google!

1. Understand the Science Behind Google

- Web Crawling (24/7 indexing of websites)
- Caching (copies of websites)
- Google takes your instruction literally, so be clear about what you want



2. Let the Past Aid in the Present: Web History

When you search using Google.com, Google strives to provide the best possible results. In order to do that, they take into account your past Google search activity when prioritizing your results. This is done through Web History. If you regularly search for genealogy topics, that will influence your future results lists.

You must have a free Google account to take advantage of Web History. However, you can turn it off if you find that it interferes with the search results you are looking for by simply signing out of your Google account before conducting your search.

1. Go to www.Google.com/accounts
2. Sign in or create a free account

If you're visiting a webpage or performing a search that you don't want stored in your Google Web History here is how to deactivate it:

1. Go to <https://history.google.com>
2. Click the three vertical dots in the upper corner of the Web History page and select **Settings**
3. Click the **Pause** button, and then click the **Pause** button in the pop up window
4. To start keeping track of your web search activity again, click the **Turn on** button, and then click the **Turn on** button in the pop up window

3. Create a Plan of Attack

- Identify what you specifically want to find. Don't just search for a name. 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. Consider keywords that might be associated with the name such as a location, an occupation, an unusual given name of a relative, etc. Build these elements into your search to customize it.

4. Use the Right Tools for the Job: Search Operators

Employ and combine “operators” to achieve manageable sized, higher quality results:

Quotation Marks: Use with a “keyword” or “keyword phrase” to ensure that the keyword or phrase will appear in every result, exactly as you typed it.

OR: Use to give Google options. Example: “John, Green” OR “Green, John”

AROUND: *Lillian AROUND(2) Larson* would retrieve results where the two terms are written on the page in close proximity (within 2 words)

Asterisk (*): Holds the place of a character (initial), keyword, or short keyword phrase. Example: “Lars * Larson”

Minus Sign (-): Removes unwanted words or phrases from search results. Examples:

John Lincoln –abraham -president

Abraham Lincoln –“civil war”

Numrange (..): Ensures that all results contain a year that falls within the range specified. Example: 1790..1830

Operators can be **mixed and matched** as needed. There is no limit to search query length.

Click the **Search Tools button** to further narrow your search results.

5. Analyze the Results

Internet searches rarely achieve the ideal results with the first search.

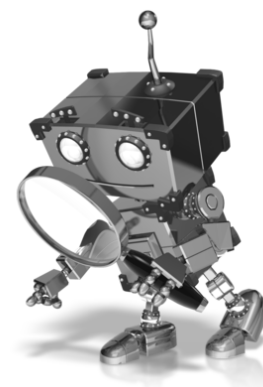
There’s a lot to learn from search results that will your improve skills. Analyze the results you receive to determine which keywords are associated with unwanted websites. Employ the minus sign operator to remove them and run your search again. You will know you are becoming a sophisticated Googler when your search queries become longer and you run multiple versions of the query before achieving the desired results.

Keep in mind the “exact science” of search. Google will take your query literally! Chances are if you are not getting the results you expected or hoped for, you need to revise what you are telling Google to search for (and not to search for).

Word order matters! Watch <http://youtu.be/xcUuNORncN0>

Putting it to the Test #1

Mercer Alton’s son Frank was born in 1892 in San Francisco. Unfortunately, his birth certificate was destroyed along with the courthouse in the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. While you could pay for access to an alternative source such as a report of the birth in the newspapers, Google can dig up free alternatives if they exist.



Putting it to the Test #2

Google Scholar – www.scholar.google.com

While on vacation years ago Sue was told by a tour guide that she had done her thesis on Sue's ancestor. What a coincidence! She didn't get the guide's name or phone number, but Google found her and the theses anyway.

Putting it to the Test #3

YouTube – www.youtube.com

Sunny had helped her husband's family climb their tree. They told her that unfortunately their family didn't have old home movies like her family was lucky to have. Little did she know that Google Search and YouTube could prove them all wrong.

6. Leverage Google's Strengths

LINK: Search

1. Copy the URL address for a favorite website (perhaps you have found a cousin who has a family website chock full of information and photographs.)
2. Go to www.Google.com
3. Type LINK: in the search box and immediately after it paste the URL (Hint: Control V will paste)
4. Run your search and Google will return a list of all the websites that have linked to that great website you found. Chances are that these websites linked to the original one for a very good and relevant reason.

Example: *LINK:www.greatfamilyhistorywebsite.com*

RELATED: Search

Not all websites that discuss the same family have found each other or are linked to each other. But Google can determine the 'relatedness' of websites. RELATED search is conducted the same way as described above except you will substitute *RELATED:* for *LINK:*

Example: *RELATED:www.greatfamilyhistorywebsite.com*

This will return a results list comprised of the website that most closely match the website you designated. It's like taking an entire website full of keywords and stuffing it into the Google search box. Google knows exactly which websites mention the same prominent keywords with the same level of frequency. The websites that top the results list are your best leads.

7. Put Google to Work for You: Google Alerts

You certainly don't want to lose all your hard work that you have put into crafting your search queries. Rather than creating dozens of sticky notes with your searches scribbled on them, save and automate your surname searches with Google Alerts.

How to Create a Google Alert for Your Search Query:

1. Highlight and copy (Control C) the search query from the Google Search box
2. Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts>
3. Make sure you are signed into your free Google account
4. Paste your search query into the Search Query box on the Google Alerts page
5. Select the Result Type you desire (Example: *Everything, News*, etc.)
6. Select how often you wish to receive alerts (Example: *Once a Day*)

7. Select How Many results you want to receive (Example: *Only the Best Results*)
8. Enter / Select the email address you want your alerts to be send to
9. Click the CREATE ALERT button

Alerts

Monitor the web for interesting new content

Q "Lars * Larson" OR "Larson, Lars" "Winthrop" MN 1871... 1937 -radio

How often	At most once a day
Sources	Automatic
Language	English
Region	United States
How many	Only the best results
Deliver to	genealogygemspodcast@gmail.com

CREATE ALERT
Hide options ▲

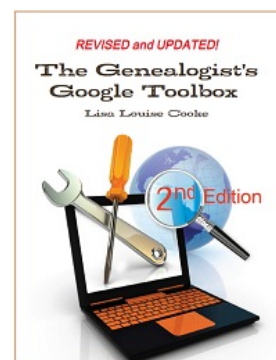
Resources

Cooke, Lisa L. *The Genealogist's Google Toolbox Second Edition*, Genealogy Gems Publications, 2015. www.genealogygems.com

Genealogy Gems Premium Website Membership

Includes videos of all of Lisa's most popular genealogy classes
Including *Common Surname Google Search Secrets* and *Ultimate Google Search Strategies*

<http://lisalouisecooke.com/premium-membership/>



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