

## Tips and Tricks for Improving Your Search Results by Julie Wilcox

Write down everything you already know about the person or family you are researching. What are you missing? Set a goal. What do you want to learn or find? Use a timeline, a spread sheet, a research log, etc.

1. Use a variety of search engines and web sites. Don't limit yourself to one or two research aides. Some of my favorite web sites: FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com, Genealogybank.com, fold3.com, arkivalieronline, findmypast.com, newspapers.com....and more! Don't forget to try google searches, and look for state and county websites, historical societies, country websites and more! (Use the Family Search WIKI and Cyndislist.com to find a wealth of links to online records).
2. Refine Your Search Results. Become familiar with each web site and how to refine a search on that particular site. If you open the search records tab on Family Search, you will see a helpful link to the left of the search boxes titled "Tips for Effective Searches".

Narrow the search with filters: birth date and place, marriage date and place, residence date and place, death date and place, gender, or other event such as immigration or military service.

3. Try Different Spellings of Names – Watch for abbreviations, nicknames, wrong transcriptions, alternate spellings, middle names, and even names changed from foreign to an Americanized version of the name. Look at these helpful articles on the Family Search WIKI: "Traditional Nicknames in Old Documents", "Spelling Substitution Tables for the United States and Canada", and "Name Variations in United States Indexes and Records", "Guessing a Name Variation", and "Abbreviations Lists for Personal Names (English)"! [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Guessing\\_a\\_Name\\_Variation](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Guessing_a_Name_Variation)
4. Use both maiden name and married name when searching for female ancestors. You will receive different results for each search!
5. Use wildcards. A wildcard search uses symbols to replace any single character or series of characters in a search. Wildcards can improve your search results if you only know some of the characters in a name or place, or the name you are searching has various spellings (Think of all the ways you might spell even a simple name like Nelson). Use "?" to represent any one character. Use "\*" to represent zero or more characters. You can also use both wildcards in one search. However, to use a wildcard, the word must have at least three other letters.

6. Add a Relationship. Search results can sometimes be improved by searching for multiple life events or relationships. For example, you can add a spouse or one or both parents....but, be careful...the more data you enter, the fewer search results you will have. Don't add ALL the data you have, instead try a variety of searches. One of my favorite types of record searches is a parent-only search.
7. Use The FAN Club when searching – Family, Acquaintances, and Neighbors. Search for all known family members. A sibling or child may have records that are easier to find and might have the data you are looking for. Did your relative belong to special society? What church did they attend?
8. Look at the original document if possible. Hidden data or clues may be found on the original document including information that was not indexed. Look at each document carefully to glean its full value.
9. Think like a detective! Look for clues and follow through on each lead. Use the five "W"'s of analysis: Who? What? Where? When? And Why? Compare all the "evidence" from primary and secondary sources.
10. Leave no stone unturned! If you are really serious, Find and attach all the records, photos, documents you can find....the elusive bit of information you are seeking may be on that passenger list or probate record...
11. Use the Research WIKI on FamilySearch.org to learn about the area or topic you are researching. The WIKI is found under the SEARCH tab on the home page. It is like an on-line encyclopedia for genealogy research.
12. Learn to use the web site Catalogs (I use both familysearch.org and ancestry.com catalogs)... Find more records that may have data about your ancestors - microfilms, books, etc. – much is not indexed! Some records that are not indexed can be browsed; you can look at the images at home instead of at a library on microfilm.
13. Pray for Guidance and help.

Henry B Eyring, April 2005: "After you find the first few generations, the road will become more difficult...You will be tempted to stop and leave the hard work of finding to others who are more expert or to another time in your life. But you will also feel a tug on your heart to go on in the work, hard as it will be. As you decide, remember that the names which will be so difficult to find are of real people to whom you owe your existence in this world and whom you will meet again in the spirit world...Their hearts are bound to you. Their hope is in your hands. You will have more than your own strength as you choose to labor on to find them."