

Teaching them to Fish

The official statement from the Church Handbook of Instructions states that our role as family history consultants is to help members “begin and continue” their temple and family history work. Teaching them to fish, is the “continue” part. We must help members see the way to find and discover information for themselves.

Most of the people who begin doing family history don’t know what records to look for, where they are located or how to find them. It’s our task to simplify for them, this enormous amount of resources. It helps if they can categorize them into two groups:

Compiled sources of research done by others

Family pedigree databases, message boards, family trees, published and unpublished family histories

These are the sources of information we go to first, to save us the effort of doing things twice and to give us clues for finding primary sources.

Original source material

Vital records, court documents, land patents, military records, ship manifests, naturalization papers, city directories, censuses, newspapers, cemetery records, tax rolls, religious records

The Power of the Internet

The internet is a source for finding records, but if we learn to take advantage of its full potential it becomes an almost indispensable tool for family history.

With the internet, we can locate background material and maps, take on-line courses, connect and collaborate with other researchers, find out how to retrieve records from archives, purchase software, and much more.

Step 1 - Understand the workings of the internet and empower others.

*The **surface web** is a collection of web pages—12 to 45 billion, indexed and easily retrieved by search engines such as Google.*

*The **deep web** consists of dynamic web pages not accessible by automated search engines. It is estimated to be about 80 to 85 percent of the internet and growing faster than the surface web.*

The most valuable resources for genealogists are the searchable databases found in the deep web. Search engines can be used to find the sources of information in the deep web, which can then be searched to find the specific piece of information. First find the site...then search the databases.

Three basic ways to locate useful information on the internet: Stumble across it. Ask someone to tell where it is. Use search engines to find it.

A search engine is a term used to describe any tool for searching the internet....

To search the entire indexed part of the web, to search a website, to search a database, to search a directory, or to perform specialized searches.

How do web search engines work?

Spider: *The program that traverses the web from link to link, identifying and reading pages*

Index: *Database containing a copy of each web page gathered by the spider*

Search and Retrieval Mechanism: *Technology that enables users to query the index and that returns results in a schematic order*

Most of the major search engines collect all of the words on the page, as well as their placement. The engines don't think, they simply use pattern matching and scoring attributes.

Note is taken of how the pages are connected and the themes running through them.

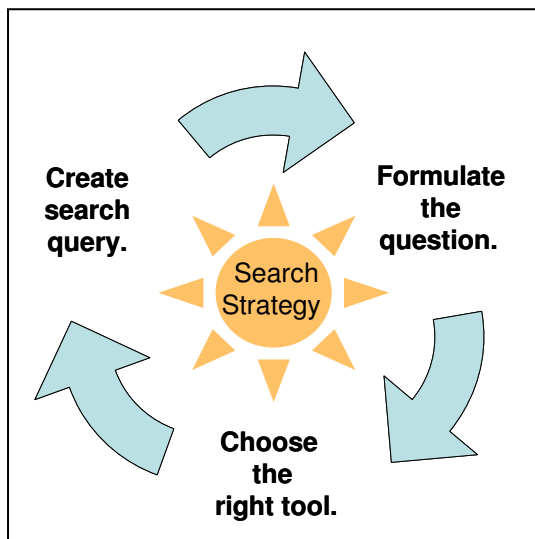
A query box is provided to type keywords which the search engine uses to return a list of relevant pages.

Each search engine has its own closely guarded secret method of page ranking.

Usually it is a combination of popularity (measured by links) and weights (number of times keywords appear on page and their proximity).

Step 2 – Putting together an effective search strategy

When you design a search strategy you are planning how you will look for information.



Formulating the Question

Thinking is key. Narrow down a broad and unanswerable question and continue to reduce it until you see what the **fundamental question** is.

A specific question is a question that you can easily recognize the answer when you find it: **When did the state of Georgia begin keeping death records? Can I get a copy from the state archives?** You must be able to tell your computer exactly what information you are looking for.

Choosing the Right Tool

General Search Engine - It's not that Yahoo and Microsoft search engines don't work as well as Google, but that people just don't try them as often. You will always get different results with different search engines!

Subject Directory- Directories are human-compiled and have a small number of pages in their databases (usually in the low millions). A web **portal** is nothing more than a subject-specific directory. The best portals have done some of the research work for you!

Specialized Search Engine - a search engine that will find web pages on a particular topic

When is it best to use a Subject Directory?

When you have a broad, general topic and want to browse to see what is out there.

When you want to see only recommended, evaluated sites.

When is it best to use a Search Engine?

When you have a very specific, narrowly defined topic.

When you are looking for a specific web page, organization, company, etc.

Choose the tool by what task you are trying to accomplish:

Am I looking for background information? Am I looking for a compiled family history? Am I looking for an original source document? Do I need to use one tool to search for another tool—i.e. Google for portals?

Creating a Search Query.

The Internet is all about KEYWORDS. Your aim is to get a small number of relevant, specific, and quality results.

Internet Math:

boonville indiana Retrieves pages with both the words, Boonville and Indiana, the “and” is implied and does not need to be typed in.

crocker -betty Retrieves pages containing the word Crocker, but not Betty.

henry OR heinrich Retrieves pages with either the words Henry or heinrich.

“henry hickenlooper” Retrieves pages with the words henry and hickenlooper together.

Beware, if you try to get too specific, you may eliminate the one site you need!

To increase the likelihood of finding relevant material:

- 1- Think about and look for alternative search terms that might be used to describe the same concept, such as synonyms, acronyms, or spelling variations.
- 2- Use words on the pages you find to refine a new search.
- 3- Look at the number of hits and decide if you need to narrow the search or broaden it.

Narrow the Search:

- 1- Find pages with a particular word only in the url ([url:keyword](#)), on a particular site ([site:keyword](#)), or a particular filetype ([filetype:keyword](#)).
- 2- You can also narrow down the results by putting in a date range (1845..1875).
- 3- An * can be used as a wildcard for missing words (georgia * records)
- 4- By using Advanced Search on Google, you can narrow results to only pages created recently—Look for “Numeric Range” and click on the drop down box.
- 5- Find pages with two words in close proximity by connecting with 3 asterisks: (clinton***rodham)

Reading the Results:

- 1- Click on “Cached” to see the original page as it was indexed originally, before updates. This can also be a helpful tool when the link to the page does not work.
- 2- Click on “Similar Pages” to see other pages related to your search.
- 3- Clicking on “Search within results” is another way to narrow the search, by performing a second search with new key words.

If you want to learn all the ins and outs of searching with Google go to www.googleguide.com

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Teaching is helping people to turn information into knowledge. Give them the opportunity to do things with the information and gain the confidence to try it on their own.

Teach them to first look for family histories, pedigrees, and other sources of research done by others.

Teach them four basic tasks when looking for records:

1. How to find out what records exist
2. How to look for sources of digital copies, transcriptions, or an index online.
3. How to search the FHL Catalog to see if the records have been microfilmed.
4. How to obtain a copy from the repository

Teach them how to use the tools of the internet!