

Avoid the Pitfalls

<i>Start with a well-documented family group record</i>	Compile a family group with a source footnote for every source that mentions the family. Show every event for every family member (not just birth, marriage and death events), including census, migration, military service, jury duty, acquisition or sale of land, and wills. This family group record becomes a road map of clues to suggest further places to research.
Research logs	Keep good <i>research logs</i> for each family. [9] List the objective of each of your searches; for example, list John Doe's name and the type of event (birth, marriage, or death). List every record you plan to search BEFORE you search it. If you do not find what you seek, write "nil" on the log so you know you have already searched there and do not need to repeat that search. Too many "nils" show you should search elsewhere. If you DO find it, summarize what you found (person and event). Also list letters you write, phone calls, and Internet searches and results on your <i>research log</i> .
Document and organize AS YOU GO	When you search a document but it has no information about your ancestor, his kin, or his neighbors, write "nil" in the results field. If you DO find something, do the following before you look for any more documents (or lay your head on your pillow):
	Photocopy the new source document. - Identify the source (footnote information) on the front of the photocopy. - Write your own document filing number on the back of each photocopy. - Log the new document number and summarize the events/people you found on all appropriate logs. - Transfer new family data from the source to appropriate family group records. - Enter new source footnotes for every piece of data on a source, even if that event already has a note. - Add a preliminary assessment of the data and its reliability to the end of each source footnote. [11] - Print the updated family group record.

	i. File the new family group and photocopy.
<i>Search worldwide indexes for John Doe's family name</i>	For a list of worldwide database indexes use the links at the end of the Wiki article " Major Databases for United States Research. "
<i>Look for John Doe's death documents.</i>	Look for obituaries, church burials, church bell tolling lists, funeral sermon eulogies, funeral home records, funeral cards, tombstones, sexton's records, insurance, pensions, Social Security, death certificates, family Bibles, wills, estate papers, and land sales papers.
<i>Local histories, biographies, and genealogies.</i>	Town and county histories often have biographical information about citizens. Look in the Family History Library Catalog . Use Place Search from the drop down put in STATE, or COUNTY –then use key word in drop down put in HISTORY for counties, or STATE, COUNTY, TOWN – HISTORY for town histories. Repeat for the topic BIOGRAPHY and again for GENEALOGY.

THESE ARE THE BASICS. USE THESE STRATEGIES ON EVERY GENEALOGICAL PROBLEM, ESPECIALLY REALLY TOUGH ONES.

Dissect the Research Problem

<i>Draw a time line</i>	showing EVERY documented event in John Doe's life. Include schooling, wars, censuses, births-marriages-deaths of relatives, emigration, everything! Then work to fill in the blanks.
<i>Organize, review, and evaluate the evidence.</i>	Summarize the problem. Rearrange relevant sources in a different logical order. Review old sources for overlooked clues. Separate what you assume from what you know. Sort and weigh the evidence. Analyze information for relevance, directness of the evidence, believability of the source, likelihood of the event, transcription errors, accuracy of data, and consistency with other facts. Write a formal research report to clarify your thinking. Write why you searched where you did, what you found or did not find, and what that means; construct a well-documented family group record; and list what should be searched next, why, how long that will take, and the likelihood of success.
<i>Use forms to create new brain connections and raise questions</i>	Create in-out lists to help track each piece of family land. Compare changes in census answers over the years. Ask questions beyond the detail that is obvious. Suggested forms: Holes to fill in a person's life, Source citations that need

completing, Facts that need better evidence, Facts that seem questionable, Ancestral associates and their roles. [\[12\]](#)

FORCE YOUR BRAIN TO THINK ABOUT THE PROBLEM IN NEW WAYS. EXPAND THE NUMBER OF SOURCES USED.

Redirect Your Research

<i>Be thorough</i>	Be prepared to search ALL the records of your ancestor, ALL his kin and associates, during ALL periods of their lives, in ALL the jurisdictions where they lived, and ALL possible repositories. For example, use all types of census schedules including local copies where they exist. Analyze all the tax records, land and property records, mortgages, and each and every variety of estate probate papers. Study surrounding entries looking for neighbors and associates. Find every document available. [13] Think about and watch for associated papers created at the same time as the ones you have already found.
<i>Substitute record types</i>	Stay focused on one question, but change the record type you search to find the answer. See United States Record Selection Table to identify alternative record types you could use to find answers to your genealogical question.
<i>Use a checklist.</i>	State and national articles describe record types useful for those places. Search EVERY record type. NOTE: All of the information from the original research outlines has been imported and is being updated by the genealogical community.
<i>Switch jurisdictions</i>	If the answer you want isn't found in county records, then search at the town, state, and national levels for similar records. Write for or search catalogs for larger or smaller jurisdictions of the organization.
<i>Area searches</i>	Look in neighboring counties or towns. Conduct an area search of surrounding towns and counties within 5, 10, or 25 miles of the place where they lived. Gradually expand distances searched.
<i>Try an exhaustive preliminary survey</i>	Look in the International Genealogical Index , Ancestral File , Pedigree Resource File , and Search Family History Web Sites . Thoroughly search for John Doe's family in every source in United States Genealogy and United States Biography and in Wiki article for John Doe's state. Look up the family name in the appropriate "Regional Indexes" cited on pages 440-41 in the first edition of Arlene Eakle and Johni Cerny's The Source .

	A Guidebook of American Genealogy (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1984). [FHL book 973 D27ts].
<i>Search more libraries and archives</i>	Research the local county and state historical and genealogical societies, state library, law library, archives, government documents library, and National Archives.

Search records of kin, neighbors, and associates.

<i>Find John Doe's children</i>	Thoroughly research the children to find clues about the parents.
<i>Research neighbors and relatives</i>	People move in groups. The neighbor often came from the same place as your ancestor. Plot your ancestor's land and run the deeds of each neighbor. Find out who the witnesses on documents are. [14] Study a family in community context. Study people in the area with the same surname and with different surnames in the same house. Identify census neighbors at least 12 before/after. Near a county/state line, study families over the line. Comb the area for same first names, origins, or jobs. [15]

Creative Construction - logic, deduction, inference, and inspiration

<i>Create a master research plan</i>	Identify a problem. Set a research goal. Figure out which records are likely to contain answers and which repositories to use. Track 'em down. Write up and share the results.
<i>Correlate and integrate records of neighbors.</i>	Even "landless" ancestors may be traced by creatively using data about neighbors and correlating it with facts about the problem ancestor. Identify census and land office neighbors. Organize and sort what you know and look for similarities and dissimilarities. Keep asking what your correlated sources imply about subtle relationships or further records and clues. [16]
<i>Study migration patterns.</i>	Rivers and mountains channeled migration trails into predictable patterns. When you know where a family settled, you can often infer where they came from. First settlers often named their new town after the place they left behind.
<i>Try to disprove uncertain connections</i>	Use a process of elimination to find ancestors. If a person died too early, lived too long, or lived in the wrong place, he isn't yours. Drop people from the list by finding their death records (or by finding them in records after your person died). Always attempt to disprove what you think is the last

	remaining link, too. Test new information by comparing it with what you already know.
<i>Listen to your feelings</i>	Use inspiration and intuition wisely as a guide to your research.

Refocus and Follow Up

Get an education. Read	Some really tough problems are solved as a result of learning more or by good follow up. 31. how-to genealogy books for John Doe's state and nation. Study histories of John Doe's town, county, and state. Subscribe to periodicals of local genealogical societies where John Doe lived. Subscribe to Internet e-mail lists for the area where John Doe settled, his ethnic group, or religion. Read case studies in magazines like National Genealogical Society Quarterly to learn how to solve tough problems and give you hope. Take classes , attend lectures, join in computer "chat" sessions, and go to genealogical conferences about the area where the family settled, their ethnic group and religion, and about genealogical research methods. Travel to the places where John Doe's family lived to see cemeteries, neighbors, old folks, archives, libraries, churches, genealogical and historical societies, and learn about the local way of life.
. Get help.	Do genealogical good deeds in hopes that others will someday help you. Write to and join local genealogical and historical societies for help. Place queries in their newsletters. Write to small-town newspaper editors and place a query in their newspapers. Place queries at genealogical web sites on the Internet and repeat from time to time until you get results. If the surname is unusual, telephone people with the same name. Nationwide telephone directories are available on the Internet. Leave a message in a Zip-Lock bag flag by a grave just before Memorial Day. Hire a professional genealogist . Pray for help. Submit ancestors for ordinances.
Share	Give in order to receive. Contribute to the Family History Library's Wiki , to Family Tree Makers's World Family Tree Pedigrees , to the Everton's Genealogical Helper Magazine's Computer Roots Cellar, to Keith A. Johnson's Genealogical Research Directory , and to family group sheet exchanges advertised in <i>Everton's Genealogical Helper Magazine</i> . Send a copy of John Doe's family history (include your address) to each county library and to each state and county genealogical society where John Doe lived. Publish an article on the family in their local genealogical periodical. Register your address in directories of members of genealogical Internet

	web sites and submit your genealogy to their libraries. Put your genealogy on a web page and register your site with major search engines and lists. Other researchers will start to contact you and share added details.
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Sources

1. Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Genealogical Mindset Principles of Scholarship" (lecture in Course 4 Advanced Methodology Evidence, Institute for Genealogical and Historical Research at Stamford University, Birmingham, Ala., 13 June 2005).

Related Content

- [Rookie Mistakes](#)
- [Burned Counties Research](#)
- Jones, Thomas W. [Inferential Genealogy](#). (120 minute video online) [FamilySearch Research Classes Online](#), 2010.
- https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Solving_Tough_Research_Problems%E2%80%94Overcoming_Brick_Walls
- [The Negative Search](#) vs, Negative Evidence

Brick Wall or Dead End

Sometimes there is no information out there right now

"I've talked with director of archive and she told me that these books are dirty (at a very bad condition, the pages full of mud) and she does not sure if they are really available for research." details found in the Ukraine Archives

" From: HOMARGOL@aol.com

Subject: Previously unknown records discovered in Lithuanian Archive

Interesting new records have just been found in the Lithuania Archives! Early in the 19th century, the Russian government offered Jews the possibility of moving to Siberia (mostly Tobolsk gubernia) and to Novorossia (to Kherson and Iekaterinoslav gubernias) to become farmers and work the land. The Archives has found the lists of Jewish families who were to move to Novorossia or to Siberia. It is unknown if all the listed families actually moved."

Sometimes it is important to just say to yourself, this is all I can do right now and call it a Dead End and no longer a brick wall!