ancestry.com

Ancestry Anne's Top 10 Search Tips

Looking for search results that are right on target? Try Ancestry Anne's search tips, from basic to advanced. You won't use them all at once but each can help you zero in on your search for answers.

Tip 1: BASIC

Start by entering everything you know about the people in your family line into your Ancestry.com family tree. Include modern details as well as records you uncover while research-ing. Ancestry.com Hints automatically search for records based on the details you've saved in your family tree. You'll be notified whenever a record that may match your family member is found, even when that record comes from a brand new collection.
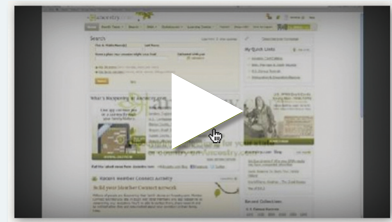
Tip 2: BASIC

Try to include at least one location whenever you search, whether it's a birthplace or somewhere the person may have lived. Even an educated guess will help the Ancestry.com search engine narrow down possible matches for you. Bonus: the same goes for birth year – add one if you have it, or make a good guess.

Tip 3: BASIC

Click the map. Scroll down when you're on the Ancestry.com Search tab until you get to the map at the bottom of the page. Then select the place your family member lived to see all of the collections on Ancestry.com associated with it. Watch our video, Finding Collections with State Pages (www.ancestry.com/cs/us/videos) to learn how.

Tip 4: INTERMEDIATE

Choose the "Collection Priority" menu on the Advanced Search form to limit the collections you search to one geographic area. For example, you can limit your searches to just the United States by selecting "United States" and choos-ing "Show only records from these collections."
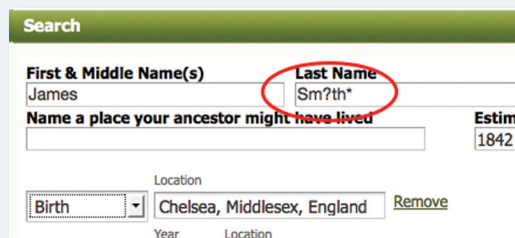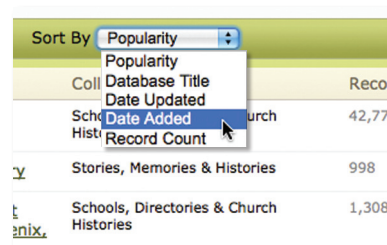
Tip 5: `INTERMEDIATE`

Use the Card Catalog, located on the Search drop-down menu, to find collections you want to search.

    a. Enter a state, county or city name in the Keyword field to find local histories and other local collections.

    b. Enter a surname in the Keyword field to uncover surname histories. Note, the Card Catalog only searches titles of collections, not individual names in records.

Tip 6: `INTERMEDIATE`

In the Card Catalog, select Sort by Date Added to find the most recently added collections or Sort by Date Updated to see recently updated collections. You may discover there's brand new information you haven't looked through yet.
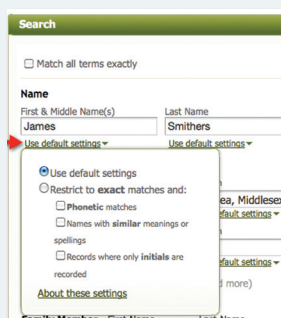
Tip 7: `INTERMEDIATE`

Try a wildcard. Replace potentially tricky letters in a name with a question mark or asterisk (? replaces a single letter; * replaces zero or more letters). For example, a search for Sm?th* will match Smith, Smyth, Smythe, Smithers and Smithson as well as other derivatives. You must include at least three letters in every wildcard search, so Sm* won't work.

Tip 8: `INTERMEDIATE`

Keep the search local by using location filters. From Advanced Search, select "use default settings" under location. Start by restricting to the place exactly. Not the results you were looking for? Gradually expand outward – county, state, etc. – to pull in more more results.

Caution: *Before you search again, return these filters to "default," or you may limit your future results.*

Tip 9: `ADVANCED`

Using Advanced Search, select first-name filters to limit the number of potential matches you receive. Choosing "phonetic matches" gives you sound-alikes. Selecting "similar meanings" will return known nicknames, such as Bill for William. Filters leave you fewer results to scan through and each one will be more targeted.

Caution: *Before you search again, return these filters to "default," or you may limit your future results.*

Tip 10: `ADVANCED`

To focus more closely on the last name, use the last-name filters in Advanced Search. Start with exact; if that proves too limiting, expand out to phonetic, similar and Soundex.

Caution: *Before you search again, return these filters to "default," or you may limit your future results.*