

Getting Started

GOLDEN RULES OF GENEALOGY

1. **ALWAYS** work backwards from the known (yourself) to the unknown (forebears)
2. **NEVER** believe everything on a Birth, Death or Marriage certificate
3. **NEVER** completely trust the spelling of surnames, place names etc.
4. **ALWAYS** check surname variants when researching
5. **ALWAYS** have at least 2 separate sources of proof for each event
6. **REMEMBER** that everything is only speculation until verified
7. **ALWAYS** photocopy certificates and important documents and leave the originals in a safe place
8. **NEVER** carry original documents around with you
9. **JOIN** at least one Family History Group, Genealogical Society or Historical Society
10. **SHARE** your information and documentation (copies only) with other researchers

START with your immediate family

Obtain copies of your birth certificate, your parents' marriage certificate and each of their birth certificates. If these are not available they can be purchased from the relevant Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (or Transcription Agents in NSW only), see our BDM Certificates page for details.

Visit, or phone, your relatives – especially the older members of your family – and ask them about their family. Whatever you do, don't put off visiting your elderly relatives for too long. Genealogy is littered with some of the saddest stories you'll ever hear about researchers who left it too late to listen to stories that had been passed down for generations and contained vital family history details.

You should at least try to find out the names of your grandparents and great-grandparents. Some relatives are more talkative than others, so you may need a voice recorder as well as a notebook. Remember to take your camera on family visits.

If you are unlucky enough to strike a reluctant holder of documents, offer to take them with you to have the documents copied and promise them a copy of the (eventual) family history in return for a loan of material. Of course, if you have a digital camera or can borrow one, the hesitant document holder will not even have to leave home to agree to your request.

If you are loaned something, look after it carefully and return it promptly so the lender does not lose confidence in you.

DECIDE which branch to trace

Do you want to research your father's or your mother's family or both? To help you make this decision, check with your grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins to see if anyone is already researching them. The wise old saying, "Don't re-invent the wheel" also applies to genealogy. There is nothing worse than spending time and money on research that someone else has already done.

If there are other family historians in the family, let them know you are interested in knowing more about your ancestors. You may be able to join forces and work together, or you may be able to research one ancestral line that has not been researched.

If your family has been established in Australia for many years, it would also be a good idea to check with the Society where they settled and/or the Genealogy Society in the capital city (how to contact these is given later).