

You Need a Search Strategy – Maximizing Your Results with Online Genealogical Databases

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Hurdles in Producing Genealogical Databases

- Indexing and Keying Challenges
 - Paleography
 - Language
 - Typefaces
 - Context
- Original Document Problems
 - Second and third generation copies
 - Name abbreviations
 - Transcription and spelling
 - Deliberate lies
 - Relationships
 - Suspicion and fear
 - Damage
 - Poor preservation

Database Gotchas

- Incomplete data
- Databases are often works in progress
- Field standardization (aka “normalization”)
- Language and translation
- Image digitization

Search Engine Limitations

- Name variants
- Phonetic search techniques
- Place names
- One-size fits all
- Too many results
- Not enough results

HOW DO WE COMPENSATE? – Trying Harder and Smarter

Searching with Name Variants – Given Names

- Nicknames
- Middle Names
- Uniqueness
- Abbreviations

Searching with Name Variants – Surnames

- Cultural differences
- Surname variants
- Surname translation

Searching with Places

- Place names change over time
- Place boundaries change over time
- Political control and jurisdiction of places change over time

Searching with Dates and Ages

- Dates are often estimates
- Ages are often estimates
- Honest mistakes and deliberate lies

Going the Extra Mile

- Searching with other fields
- Date ranges
- Clever combinations
- Wildcards
- Read and study database descriptions
- Historical context

Searching Free Text Collections

- OCR is far from perfect
- Keywords vs. extracted fields vs. metadata.