

# Beginning Genealogy: Basic 1<sup>st</sup> Steps

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## 1. **Learn.**

Megan Smolenyak's *Who Do You Think You Are* is an excellent book for getting started because she writes in a way that's very easy to understand and follow. Smolenyak she keeps it simple while conveying a lot of information. Other resources I recommend are [familysearch.org's Wiki](http://familysearch.org/wiki), and [ancestry.com's Genealogy Toolkit](http://ancestry.com/genealogy-toolkit). Both are free and have many resources, including free research guides for topics and places. There are many more books, as well as webinars, that you can use in your genealogy education, but think of these as the first building blocks in your journey. You may also consider joining a genealogy or historical society. Just learn at your own pace so you don't end up overwhelmed.

## 2. **Start with yourself.**

Write down and then chart what you know about your family, including aunts and uncles and any of your grandparents and their known siblings. You can start with pencil and paper, or use one of the free charts at <http://www.ancestry.com/download/charts#ancchart>, and [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogy\\_Research\\_Forms](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogy_Research_Forms).

## 3. **Look around the house . . .**

for documents and other items that can provide clues and information, such as funeral cards, pictures, obituaries, marriage certificates, family cookbooks, heirlooms, and so on. Check with other relatives to see if they have any of these sort of items that could provide information or insight.

## 4. **Interview relatives.**

Record the stories of older family members, while you can and they remember. Ask permission, and be prepared with questions. It's helpful to have pictures and other memorabilia to spur memories and make the person feel more comfortable. Also, use open-ended questions rather than yes or no questions. A google search for "[genealogy interview questions](#)" brings back plenty of options; and I also highly recommend *A Grandparent's Book* by Milton Kamen.

## 5. **Get organized.**

Use charts and/or family tree software to keep track of what you're learning from relatives and documents, and to keep track of your research.

## 6. **Work your way backward from the present.**

If you skip generations you're more likely to make mistakes and end up with the wrong people. The goal is to find YOUR family. Each generation provides information about the previous one, so doing thorough research one generation at a time, starting with yourself, will help prevent mistakes.

## 7. **Learn about the kinds of documents . . .**

you'll need to find, and how to find them. This will involve learning a little about the history of each time period and location in which you research. You won't need to become an expert, but

it will help to understand what was happening in your ancestor's world, and why and WHEN these documents were created. Were they created at the time of the event, or 40 years later?

8. **Read the whole document.**

Pay attention to details, find all the clues. It's exciting to find that document, but be sure to pay attention to everything in it because each document can help lead to the next.

9. **Keep an open mind.**

Name spellings varied, boundaries changed, and sometimes our ancestors did things we didn't expect. Don't assume he/she never moved, or that the family lore is all true.

10. **Collaborate.**

Genealogists love to share and help each other. There are blogs, websites, pages and groups on Facebook and Google+, and also local groups such as genealogical and historical societies. All are full of people who are willing to listen and help.

11. **Share.**

Regardless of whether your family wants to hear about what you're learning about family history, it's a good idea to share either online or in book form. After all this work, you want to be sure to pass along this treasure for future generations. Remember, it's not only for those of us who are here now, these stories are for great-great-grandkids, great-nieces and nephews, and even for those who aren't related. Every person's story is a part of everyone's history.

Happy Hunting!!