

FamilySearch Tips—Handout

Five Additional Search Techniques



With Diane Loosle

Overview

This handout provides information about using alternative search techniques in FamilySearch.

Conducting a Basic Search

A basic search in FamilySearch involves inputting a name in the search fields and clicking **Search**. However, this may not yield the information you are want. Below are five search techniques that may get you to the right record.

1. Narrow the Search with Filters

After you conduct a search, you can filter your results according to the following kinds of records:

- Birth date and place
- Marriage date and place
- Residence date and place
- Death date and place
- Other event date and place (such as immigration, military service, etc.)
- Gender
- Category (record type)

Filters are located on the left side of the list of search results. Here's how you use them:

1. In the search field, enter information about the person you want to find, and click **Search**.
2. Review your search results, and decide exactly what kind of record you want to find.
3. Click the filter type that you want to apply. For example, click **Birth Place**.

You can learn more about filters by going to this web address:

<https://www.familysearch.org/node/1144>

Discover Your Family History

Records Trees Catalog Books

Our records span billions of names across hundreds of collections—including birth, marriage, death, probate, land, military, IGI extracted, and more.

First Names: John Last Names: Smith

Search by Life Events: Any | Birth | Marriage | Residence | Death

Search by Relationships: Spouse | Parents

Search by: Batch Number

Search Match All Exactly Reset Form

New Search

Filter your results by: [Learn more](#)

Birth Place

- Africa (6)
- Asia & Middle East (23)
- Australia & New Zealand (23)
- Canada, USA, and Mexico (9,124)
- Caribbean, Central and South America (283)
- Europe (1,563)
- Other (55)
- Pacific Islands (2)

2. Use Wildcards

A wildcard search uses symbols to replace any single or character or series of characters in a search. Wildcards can improve your search results if you only know some of the characters in a name or place. For example the unknown characters are illegible on a record, or if a name was spelled in various ways. Wildcards broaden your search to account for these types of variations. You can use the following wildcards:

- ? Use this wildcard to represent any one character.
- * Use this wildcard to represent zero or more characters.

You can also use both wildcards in the same search. However, to use a wildcard, the word must have at least three other letters:

Works: Joh*
Does not work: Jo*

Where in the World Is Hampton Smith?

- **Problem**—Searched for Hampton Smith of Anderson County, S.C. in the 1900 U.S. census without success
- **Solution**—Search using the wild card *
Ham* Smith
- **Found** “Hamp Smith” among the entries

3. Add a Relationship

Search results can sometimes be dramatically improved by searching for multiple life events or relationships. For example, the form allows you to enter information about both the spouse and the parents, along with the marriage date of an individual. However, this search capability comes with a warning. The more data you enter, the fewer record matches you will get in your results set. It is often better to start with the name and one or two pieces of information rather than using all the information you have. After evaluating your results, you can add or change one or two pieces of information with each new search. This will allow you to search more records may help you get to the one you want.

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Given name <input type="text" value="First Names"/>	Surname <input type="text" value="Last Name"/>
Any <input type="text" value="Place"/>	Estimated Year (Range) <input type="text" value="From Year"/> <input type="text" value="To Year"/>

Add a life event: [Any](#) | [Birth](#) | [Marriage](#) | [Residence](#) | [Death](#)

Given Name of Father <input type="text" value="First Names"/>	Surname of Father <input type="text" value="Last Name"/>
Given Name of Mother <input type="text" value="First Names"/>	Surname of Mother <input type="text" value="Last Name"/>

Add a relationship: [Spouse](#) | [Parents](#)

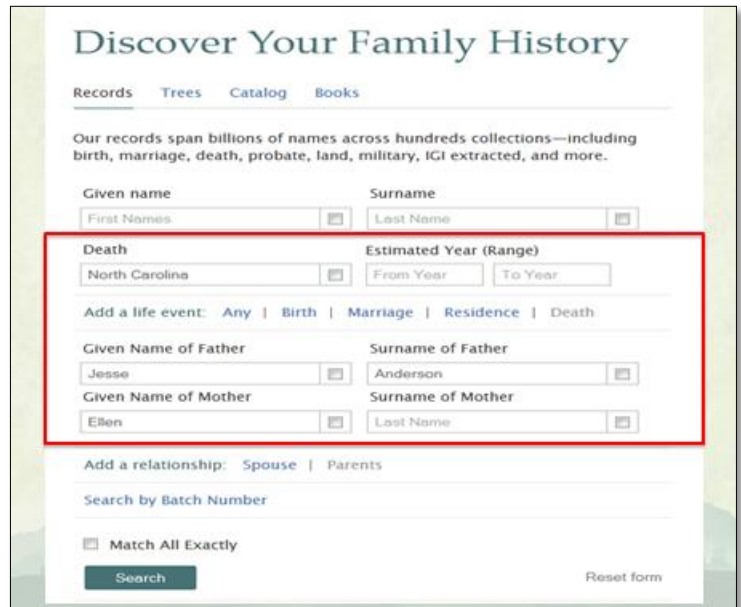
Search by Batch Number

Match All Exactly

4. Add a Life Event

You can also narrow your searches to specific life events, such as births, marriages, and deaths. Enter an individual's birth and death information to identify when and where he or she lived. If you are adding an individual's children or parents, you should also indicate whether the relationship was biological or not. Here are some factors to consider when adding life events:

- Dates, places, and relationships can help distinguish individuals who have the same or similar names.
- You can use dates and places to more accurately search for individuals.
- Knowing when and where an individual lived can help you understand what his or her life might have been like.
- Knowing when and where an individual lived can also help you find records that may contain more information about him or her.



5. Browse Images

Some collections are tagged as **Browse Images**. These collections contain images but no index. The images have been grouped, often by localities and record types known as waypoints, instead of being searchable by name. Waypoints are used to create a logical hierarchy for a record collection. For example, a census would most likely be broken into counties before cities so that the records can be located when an index is not available. Records may be waypointed by town, parish, year range, and then record type. When browsing a collection, the waypoint trail appears at the top of the page and can be used to navigate to earlier levels of waypoints (to move from parish to parish, for instance).

