Connecting Your DNA Matches

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What most of us notice after receiving the results of our autosomal DNA test is that we have way too many relatives. Most of us have hundreds of genetic cousins with no clue how to go about organizing them or determining how you share a common ancestor. You quickly realize that in order to simply maintain your sanity, you are going to need an organized method to attack your match list.

A Genetic Network is a group of individuals who share DNA and a common genealogical ancestor, even if that ancestor is yet unknown.

At least, that is my definition of a genetic network (GN).
There are two core principles at the heart of our GN:

One: We all inherited DNA from our ancestors, therefore those with shared DNA share a common ancestor.

Two: The best way to attack a match list is to find several individuals who share a common genetic and genealogical origin - essentially, a group of people who are related to each other. The thought is that it will be easier for a group of people to figure out how they are related than it is for just two people.

How To Create a Genetic Network

It is relatively easy to create a genetic network at AncestryDNA, Family Tree DNA, MyHeritage, and 23andMe. MyHeritage is my favorite because it easily allows you to see how your matches are related to each other, not just to you. 23andMe does this as well, but it is just not quite as easy to see, and not everyone in their database has opted to reveal that information. Family Tree DNA has a tool, called the Matrix tool, that helps, but it is not quite as good, while at AncestryDNA, relatedness between your matches can only be seen in the DNA Circles. Below are the steps for creating your own genetic network.

FIRST: You start with the match that you are interested in investigating and use the shared matches tool to find others who share DNA with that match. One by one you also investigate each of the shared matches to find their shared matches.

Ideally, you would also want to see how each of the cousins you have identified is

related to each other. So, for example, if you have Max and Mary as shared matches with William, all we know is that Max and Mary are both sharing DNA with you and William. We could then run the shared matches tool on Max and look for Mary to see if they share DNA. Even if they do, we still don't know what the proposed genetic relationship is between Max and Mary, which might be helpful. MyHeritage does a great job of providing that information for you, if you have your DNA there.

We can enhance our understanding of our relationships with other matches using the Shared cM Project (see www.yourDNAguide.com/scp).

NEXT: For those with genealogy posted, find the right generation in their pedigree chart where you can expect to find your common ancestor. This involves checking birthdays, and putting yourself on the right generation in your match's chart.

LAST: Do Genealogy! Find out how your matches are related to each other, and you will be on your way to discovering how you are related to them.

Finding Pedigree Charts

It won't take you long to realize that many of your best genetic matches, those you have identified as holding the key to your genealogy success do not have genealogy charts. Once you put your frustration aside, you have three options:

1. Contact them
2. Do their genealogy for them

However, you might be a little impatient waiting for them to respond, you can do a bit of investigating on your own. Everything I learned about tracking down genetic cousins I learned from my dear friend Lisa Louise Cooke. If you want to learn more from her, visit her website at www.genealogygems.com.

Start with the name your match has provided. If it is a full name, you can skip directly to the next section. If it is a username, we must first try to decode that. Essentially Google is your best friend and first stop.

Then use people finding sites like Facebook, Spokeo, and pipl.com to find your cousin. What you are really looking for is at least one ancestor born before 1940. After that, you just need to DO GENEALOGY.