

One Touch Genealogy Research: Handle a Record Just Once

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What is the One Pass Approach to Genealogy Research?

What if you only had one chance in a lifetime to access a document you absolutely needed to break through a genealogical brick wall? This often happens when you are traveling overseas, perhaps visiting an archive in the land of your ancestors, and you know you'll never make that trip again. Or, it could even happen with online searching believe it or not! (See *Never Again Tell Yourself "I'll get back to that later"* below)

In addition, do you find yourself pulling up the same document to try and prove a certain fact like a birth date? Wouldn't it be great if you could "wring out" the document and get every last detail the first time?

One of the skill sets a savvy genealogist develops is the ability to "snag" a record and all its information as quickly as possible, but at the same time, evaluate the usefulness of the record and its data. I call this the **One Pass Approach** which is:

The ability to quickly evaluate a record, save and secure an image of the record, extract as much information as possible AND write a basic source citation denoting how, when and where you accessed the record.

Research Quality vs. Quickness

Here is my "mantra" that I say each time I become overwhelmed with my family history research and feel pressured to work quickly (either due to my own time constraints or a limited time free access period at a genealogy site): "***You can't make up with speed what you lack in direction***" How true is that? And for me having a purposeful direction means striving for quality, not being sloppy, and getting it right the first time.

First, don't beat yourself up over past mistakes. And second, improving research quality is something you build over time, with constant use, practice and repetition. Remember this: ***failure is simply success in progress!***

- **Prepare a Genealogy Research Toolbox.** You never know what tool or app or website you might need while researching. Need to look something up on the FamilySearch Wiki? Need to find the German word for "baptism"? Create a research toolbox with your most used tools. The best method is a set of web browser bookmarks organized into folder.
- **Don't waste time on in-person records that already exist online or in digital format.** Sometimes there are valid reasons to work with records already available online using the original at an archive (the online scan is of poor quality, etc.). But here's an example: why should I work with a book like ***Records of the***

Dutch Reformed Church of New Paltz, New York when there might be a copy of the book online? Do a quick online search and if found online, place the records in the “research online at home” pile.

- **Speed and quality increase with repetition.** The process of documenting everything possible in a record will seem tedious and slow the first few times. But you will get into a groove, especially when you use the same record set – such as the 1930 US Federal Census – and set up a process that will become second nature to you.

Never Again Tell Yourself “I’ll get back to that later”

Isn’t it funny, the little lies we tell ourselves in both life and genealogy research? The biggest one for me was “I’ll get back to that later.” As I get older, I just don’t have the recall that I used to have PLUS if I have other life stressors going on I forget even more stuff. This is why the **One Pass Approach** is so important.

- **Create and use a To Do List.** Use whichever method that works for you. It could be the free virtual assistant program **Evernote**, the free program management app **Trello**, a simple notepad or notebook, a **Microsoft Word** document or a spreadsheet. Just have a method of writing down “leads” for later research.
- **Learn how to draft a source citation in 30 seconds or less.** Seriously. You can do this. Remember the simple formula “**Author, Title, Publisher, Year, Locator Information**” and add “**Date accessed + URL**” for online records. Worry about source citation clean up later.

You should also have a “back-up plan” and here’s what I mean: some type of “if worse comes to worse” method in case you can’t follow the disciplines in your One Pass method. Here are some ideas:

- **Have several methods of capturing the record image.** For offline (in person) research, this means not just relying on the photocopier which may be out of order. Use a mobile scanner like the **Flip-Pal mobile scanner** OR a smartphone app such as **CamScanner** or even a digital camera. A clear, high-resolution digital image can be used later to extract all the necessary information. For online research, don’t rely on right-clicking and using “Save Image As.” Make sure you have set up a free **Evernote** account and installed the Web Clipper to capture digital images. Also set up a free **Pinterest** account and install the Pinterest button on your web browser. And create a “secret” board entitled Image Captures then “pin” images to that board for later use.
- **Have several methods of capturing notes and reminders.** Besides “quick and dirty” methods of capturing images, don’t get to capture the “who, what, why, where, when” information that helps create source citations. I use the voice memo recorder on my smartphone many times if it is convenient. Or I “copy and paste” online text and either save it as a .txt file or send it to myself in an email.

Genealogy Record Triage: Quick Quality Research

Here is an actual document for which you can use the One Pass Approach. Answer the questions below and see the “answer key” at the end of this handout!

Case Study: 1940 US Federal Population Schedule for Alfred J. Austin and Family

1. Click [HERE](#) to access record on FamilySearch
<https://abundantgenealogy.com/AUSTINAlfred-1940UScensus>
2. Use ONLY the image to answer the questions below; DO NOT use any FamilySearch text or links outside of the actual image.
3. What was the Census Day for the 1940 Census?
4. On what line number does the Alfred Austin family start?
5. Who was the informant?
6. What year was Anna Austin born?
7. How many children did Alfred Austin have living with him on the Census Day?
8. In which Assembly District did Alfred Austin live?
9. What is Alfred Austin’s home address?
10. What is the Enumeration District?
11. Does the Austin family Rent or Own their home?
12. Did Alfred Austin graduate from high school?
13. What was the monthly rent for the Austin family?
14. Where did the Austin family live in 1935?
15. How many hours did Alfred Austin work the week before the Census Day?
16. What was Alfred Austin’s salary in 1939?
17. Were any members of the Austin family selected for supplementary questions?
18. Who was the enumerator for this Enumeration District?
19. What is the source citation for this record?

Tips and Tricks for Using the One Pass method

When creating your own One Pass Approach, keep these items in mind:

- **Your Research, Your Method, Your System.** Don’t squeeze the square peg that is your research into a round hole. If someone likes using Trello and a smartphone as part of their One Pass Approach, good for them. After experimenting with different methods, stick with the one that works for you, not *against* you.
- **Get Smart, Quickly!** There are times when you need to get up to speed on a new record set, the quirks and codes that can be found, etc. The best tool is the FamilySearch Research Wiki with close to 90,000 articles covering many aspects of genealogy and family history.

- **Don't Panic! Don't Get Sloppy!** When there is a time constraint, don't rush your research to the point where you miss valuable information. This could be a total waste of a research trip! Remember your back up plan if you can't implement your One Pass Approach. Get record images, get information and get out!
- **Create a Cheat Sheet for Each Record Set.** Once you use the records for a particular record set a few times, you'll begin to recognize patterns, codes, etc. Create a document listing all these items, shortcuts, etc so you can access it from your "toolbox" when needed. Example: In the 1940 US Federal Census, there should be an "x" in a circle (⊗) next to the name of the "informant" who provided the information to the enumerator.

Answer Key

3. April 1, 1940
4. Line 38
5. Anna Austin
6. Abt 1915
7. Four
8. Assembly District 7
9. 206 West End Avenue
10. 31-611
11. Rent
12. No
13. \$26 per month
14. 206 West End Avenue
15. 72 hours
16. \$1,560 per year
17. No
18. Frank T. Sheehan

Resource List

- **CamScanner**
<https://www.camscanner.com/>
- **Evernote**
<https://evernote.com>
- **FamilySearch Research Wiki**
<https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/>
- **Flip-Pal mobile scanner**
<http://genealogybargains.com/flip-pal>
- **Genealogy Research Log**
<https://genealogyresearchlog.com>
- **Steve Morse – One Step**
<https://stevemorse.org/>
- **Trello**
<https://trello.com>

Source citation: 1940 U.S. Census, New York County, New York, population schedule, Manhattan borough, Enumeration District 31-611, pp. 6A-6B (penned), 206 West End Avenue, family 152, Alfred AUSTIN family: digital images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org>: accessed 28 February 2019); from National Archives microfilm publication T627, roll 2637.