

# The Research Road Map: Your Path to Success

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Research is fun, but it can feel frustrating when you feel like you're just spinning your wheels. Having a research road map can help you focus and make more progress.

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## Setting Goals:

Meandering road trips where you don't care where you go are nice, but not when you have a specific destination in mind. The same is true with our research.

Having a goal helps us:

- Focus
- Make better plans
- Ask better questions

Where do you want to go with your research? Which line or location are you focusing on? Do you have a special project, like a scrapbook or a lineage society application, that you want to complete?

**TIP:** You can't research all of your lines at the same time.

## Asking a Good Question:

Don't get so caught up in your research that you forget what it is you're looking for. **What are you trying to find?** Pretend you're on *Jeopardy*.

*If you can't phrase it as a question, it's going to be much harder to find what you're looking for.*

Having a specific question in mind will help you narrow your focus even more and will make your efforts to evaluate sources more efficient.

## Re-examining Your Notes and Sources:

The notes you've taken and sources you've collected before might appear different now that you have information that you didn't have before. The answer you're looking for might already be in notes and sources you already have.



**Remember:** You'll look at your notes differently now than you did when you first made them.

## Reviewing and Evaluating What You Have:

Look at your source citations. How do you know what you think you know?

**A source** is whatever you use to get information. (Document, book, database, tombstone, photograph, oral interview, etc.) Described as “original” or “derivative.”

**Information** is what the source says. Described as “primary” or “secondary.”

**Evidence** is when we take information and apply it to a question. Described as “direct” or “indirect.”

As you're reviewing and evaluating your sources, ask yourself:

*Is there a better source I could be using?*

What sources *haven't* you looked at?

## Spotting Gaps in Your Research:

In addition to considering what sources you haven't looked at, are there gaps in your research — time periods or aspects of your ancestor's life that you haven't explored?

**Timelines** are excellent tools for spotting gaps. A timeline gives a different view of events than what we see on an ancestor chart or family group sheet.



**Tip:** Include your ancestor's age on events that you add to his or her timeline. This will help you spot inconsistencies and conflicting information.