

Google Searches

I am calling it a “Google search”, but these suggestions will work in whichever search engine you use. (Some others are Bing, Yahoo, DuckDuckGo, Dogpile, Creative Commons). The basic strategy for a Google search is that you want to come up with good keywords, and then combine them with different “Boolean” operators to pull out relevant information from the internet that might be buried deep in ordinary search results. This combination of keywords and Boolean operators is called a “search string”.

Once you develop some good search strings, save them to a reference sheet. You can then easily copy a search string from the reference sheet and paste it into the Google search bar, substituting key words. Keep adding and subtracting search terms to a string to get better and better results.

Sites with templates for Google genealogy searches. They have built-in Boolean operators.

1. Google Advanced Search https://www.google.com/advanced_search
2. Randy Majors <https://www.randymajors.org/ancestorsearch>
3. Easy Google Genealogy Searcher <http://www.searchforancestors.com/google/searcher.html>
4. Genealogy In Time <http://www.genealogyintime.com/tools/genealogy-search-engine.html>

You can add a shortcut to your Google search screen for any of these URLs by clicking on “Add shortcut” below the search box and pasting the URL into the box.

In an effort to personalize your search experience, keep in mind that Google factors in the following when providing you with search results:

1. Device type
2. Location
3. History, demographics, and interests

How to develop search strings

1. Write down what you want to find as a sentence.
 - a. “I am searching for the ancestors of Franklin Pomeroy, born about 1870 in Idaho, died in 1954, likely in Maricopa County, Arizona.
 - b. How many children did Thomas Gooch have?
 - c. When and where did Joseph Baldwin Tanner marry Nora Foutz?
2. Identify and underline keywords in sentences.
 - a. “I am searching for the ancestors of Franklin Pomeroy, born about 1870, died in 1954, likely in Maricopa County, Arizona.
 - b. How many children did Thomas Gooch have?
 - c. When and where did Alexander Matheson marry Lydia Evans?
 - d. What were the locations of Joseph Baldwin Tanner’s New Mexico trading posts?
3. Develop a basic search string by keeping only the keywords.
 - a. Searching, ancestors, Franklin Pomeroy, 1870, 1954, Maricopa County, Arizona
 - b. Children, Thomas Gooch
 - c. Alexander Matheson, marry, Lydia Evans
 - d. Joseph Baldwin Tanner, New Mexico, trading posts
4. Add Boolean operators

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- a. OR. Each result contains at least one of the keywords: (marry OR married OR intention OR spouse OR bann) (obituary OR death notice).
 - b. AND. Each result contains all keywords: died AND 1954 AND Arizona
 - c. NOT or MINUS SIGN (-). Exclude a keyword: probate NOT guardianship Removes results with unwanted words or phrases Make note of words that appear in more than one negative search and use a minus sign to remove those results from the search: Joseph Tanner -astronaut
 - d. QUOTATION MARKS. For exact search of keyword or keyword phrase: "Joseph Baldwin Tanner" or "Maricopa County, Arizona"
 - e. PARENTHESES: Nest search terms within the whole search string. Use around groups of keywords joined by OR.
 - f. TILDE: Find results for synonyms of a keyword (burial, cemetery records, death, etc.)
5. Wildcards
- a. * truncates or replaces entire words. "Joseph * Tanner" or "Jo* B* Tanner", Monterey, Ca* will return Monterey, CA and Monterey, California
 - b. ? replaces one letter (Thomas Go?ch) gene?logy
6. Numeric Ranges
- a. Franklin Pomeroy 1870..1954
 - b. Idaho birth records 1850..1900
7. Combine keywords and operators to create a search phrase. Copy and paste it into a research log for easy reference.
- a. (Thomas OR Tom OR Thos) AND (Gooch OR Googe) AND children
 - b. (Joseph * Tanner) AND (Nora Foutz) AND (marr* OR spouse OR intention OR bann)
 - c. "Joseph * Tanner" 1867...1944 AND (NM or New Mexico)
 - d. (J.B. Tanner OR Joe Tanner OR Joseph Tanner) AND (New Mexico OR Colorado OR Arizona)
 - e. (J.B. OR Joe OR Joseph) Tanner AND trader
 - f. San Juan County New Mexico "Probate Records" 1900...1950
8. Make adjustments to your search string by adding or removing keywords and operators until you get good results.
9. Think of adding uncommon keywords that pertain to your search subject
- a. Location
 - b. Occupation
 - c. Event
 - d. Unusual name or nickname
 - e. Family members
10. Look beyond the first page of results. Google results are ranked according to things which don't necessarily match your priorities, starting with sponsored ad pages, then "People also ask", organic results, images, and related searches. Browse the results and note the websites before clicking.
11. Click on the "Books", "More>Images", "More>Videos", and "Books>Any document>Newspapers" tabs to see results only within those categories. The Newspapers tab takes you to the defunct Google News Archive holdings, which are digitized old newspapers.
12. SITE:nameofwebsite.com. Use a Google search on a particular site. SITE:newspapers.com
13. RELATED:nameofwebsite.com. Get a results list of sites that are similar to the one you like. RELATED:https://wyohistory.org/
14. Set up Google Alerts for any search string to keep Google searching in the background, and you will be notified with new discoveries: <https://www.google.com/alerts>

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15. Do searches with different open tabs to compare results.

Some phrases you can include in a search string:

- (transcript* OR photo*)
- (New Mexico OR NM)
- (history OR family OR genealogy OR "family history")
- Lafayette (County OR Cty OR Co*) AND Missouri
- (records OR history OR archives OR library)

YouTube Tips

YouTube is a place where you can learn how to research, but did you know you can find content that gives context to your ancestors' lives, and you sometimes can even find old video footage of your ancestors? Many users have uploaded old family home movie footage, and you might just be surprised to find someone you know in those old videos. Documentaries about events, places, and industries can provide insights into your ancestor's lives, and you may come across original vintage footage of events your family participated in. Here are some tips for finding

1. Use the same search strategy used on Google—try different combinations of keywords and Boolean operators.
2. Search for events and places in addition to names
3. Search on regular Google and filter to "Videos" results. It will find video that has been posted to websites but is not on YouTube. The National Archives has a huge digital collection of vintage documentaries, for example.
4. Search for documentaries that give context to your ancestor's lives
5. Use YouTube for how-to videos on various genealogy channels.

<https://moonswings.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/genealogy-on-youtube-august-2020.pdf>

- a. FamilySearch
- b. Ancestry
- c. ICAPGen
- d. BYU Family History Library
- e. Dear Myrtle
- f. FamilyTree DNA
- g. Genealogy TV
- h. Your DNA Guide
- i. Genealogy Gems
- j. Family History Fanatics
- k. The DIY Genealogist
- l. Amy Johnson Crow
- m. Cheri Hudson Passey

BONUS:

[Genealogical & Historical Groups/pages on Facebook](#), by Katherine Willson

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Ideas for Search Strings	
Example	Components
Joseph Baldwin Tanner	All three words on same page
"Joseph Baldwin Tanner"	Exact phrase
Tanner "Tuba City"	All Tanners in locality—exact search
Tanner AND Kirtland Ohio	All Tanners in locality—city and state
Joseph Tanner -astronaut	Delete results containing unrelated items
(Joe Tanner OR Joseph Tanner) "Indian trader"	Name variations and occupation
(J.B. OR Joe OR Joseph) Tanner	Variations on his first name added to surname
"Tanner, Joseph Baldwin"	Exact search, last name first
"Hogback trading post" AND Tanner	Name of business plus surname
(J.B. Tanner OR Joe Tanner OR Joseph Tanner) AND (New Mexico OR Colorado OR Arizona)	First name variations with surname, and locality variations
Joseph Tanner -linkedin -facebook -twitter -youtube	Name minus social media results
"Joseph * Tanner" "Nora * Foutz"	Search for two people
New Mexico "Tax Records"	Locality and record type
"Joseph Baldwin Tanner" death certificate	Name and record
New Mexico online death certificates 1930..1950	Locality, record type and date range
"Joseph * Tanner" 1867..1944 AND (NM or New Mexico)	Name, date range, and locality
San Juan County (NM OR New Mexico) (probate OR guardianship) (1900..1950)	Locality, record, and date range
"Joseph Tanner" genealogy (New Mexico OR Arizona)	Name, genealogy, and locality
"Joseph Tanner" biography AND New Mexico	Name, biography, and locality
Baptis* AND Church AND Coconino (County OR Cty) AND (Arizona OR AZ)	Record and locality
(Diar* OR Letter*) AND "Coconino Co*" AND Arizona	Record and locality
(San Juan AND New*) AND (history OR family OR genealogy OR "family history")	Record and locality
Migration AND San Juan (County OR Cty) (NM OR New Mexico) AND LDS	Event, locality, and keyword

Number of Hits with Different Search Strings	
Search String	# of Results
Tanner	151,000,000
Tanner Genealogy	9,770,000
"Joseph * Tanner" (genealogy OR family history)	33,300,000
"Joseph Tanner" genealogy	5,410
"Joseph * Tanner" (1867..1944)	2,620
"(Joseph OR Joe) * Tanner" AND Kirtland New Mexico	92,900
"(Joseph OR Joe) * Tanner" AND Kirtland New Mexico AND trader	17,700
"(Joseph OR Joe) * Tanner" AND Kirtland New Mexico AND "Indian trader"	669