

The Only Thing You Need To Know About DNA and Genealogy

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Do you ever feel overwhelmed by all you need to know to apply your DNA results to your family history research? Do you attend classes or read articles online that talk about chromosome browsers and triangulation and segment analysis and centimorgans? Yikes. So much new information when all you want to do is figure out who your great grandmother's parents were!

Well, I've got some good news for you. There is only one thing you need to know in order to be successful at using your DNA results in your family history research. Seriously. One thing.

What is Success?

But before we get to that one thing, let's talk about what the word "successful" even means in this context. What will success look like to you? Well, generally, when you want to identify an ancestor, success is finding the vital records that provide the basic, essential information to identify them including: name, birth, marriage and death dates and places. But DNA can't actually provide you any of those things. DNA just provides you with the clues you need to lead you to those documents.

Clues in Ethnicity

In its early days, ethnicity results were something pretty to look at, more of a gimmick than a tool. But that has certainly changed. Both [AncestryDNA](#) and [MyHeritage DNA](#) have developed some excellent tools to help us make the most of our ethnicity results by combining location and time information to give us some insight into where our ancestors were during that genealogical sweet spot of time between 200 and 300 years ago. If you want to learn more about your ethnicity results, try our [free download](#). **But understanding your ethnicity results is not the one thing you need to know about DNA and genealogy.**

Centimorgans and Relationships

A centimorgan (cM) is a unit of measure for DNA. Very simply put, the more you share, the more you care. Unfortunately, it isn't completely straightforward in that if you share say, 50 cM with someone, you don't automatically know your relationship to that person. In fact, when you share that amount of DNA, there are several relationships you could have with that person.

Understanding [removed relationships](#), half relationships, and how that all affects your shared cMs is important when you are trying to find your ancestor, but it is not the most important thing you need to know in order to use DNA in your genealogy research.

Cousin Categories & Match Groups

In my book, [Your DNA Guide—the Book](#), I talk about this idea of cousin categories. It is really about taking a step back and asking yourself what kinds of cousins do you need in order to help you solve your family history mystery? If you are looking for a 2X great grandparent, then you will need 3rd cousins, but if you are looking for a 3X great grandparent then you will need 4th cousins. Just simply starting with that idea will help you focus on the matches in your match list that are most important.

But to really drill down to the most important matches, you need to create match groups. Sometimes called [genetic networks](#), these are groups of matches who are likely all related to each other in a similar way that they are related to you.

Cousin categories and creating match groups are both very helpful strategies in your DNA research, but they aren't the only thing you need to know to be successful.

Cheating Tools

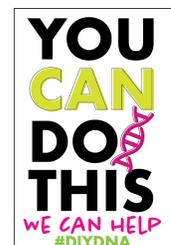
Offered by AncestryDNA, MyHeritage DNA, and 23andMe, cheating tools are suggestions your DNA testing company offers to you about how you and a DNA match might be related to each other. Cheating tools can be very helpful, but we have to consistently remember that they are cheats. That means they are not always correct, and may get you into trouble if you don't follow them wisely. Cheating tools include [AncestryDNA's ThruLines](#), [MyHeritage's Theory of Family Relativity](#) and [23andMe's genetic Family Tree](#).

Cheating tools are helpful, but not the only thing you need to know about DNA and genealogy.

Do Genealogy

Always. DNA can connect two people, but it's genealogy that confirms HOW they're connected. You'll need BOTH genealogy and DNA to build the best, most accurate, most extensive family tree you can. [Read inspiring stories about how people are using BOTH DNA+genealogy.](#)

But all of these things we have talked about, while important, are not the one thing you need to know. **That one thing is simply this: You can do this. Seriously.** If there is one thing you need to know, it is that you don't need to be overwhelmed by fancy tools or complicated strategies. Just consistently show up. Acknowledge you wins, even the small ones. And just keep moving. You've got this DNA thing.



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