



FAMILYSEARCH™

G U I D E

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Organizing Your Paper Files

Guide

Introduction

Genealogy is fun when you can find things, but it can be frustrating when you can't. Therefore, you need a simple system for organizing pedigree charts, family group records, research logs, documents, notes, and research helps so that you can readily find them again when you need them. The system needs to be:

- Simple to set up.
- Simple to maintain.
- Well-organized.
- Flexible.
- Inexpensive.
- Safe and understandable for future generations.

For additional understanding, see Background.

What You Are Looking For

- How to collect and sort genealogy materials from my home and family.
- Ideas on how to store and use paper files and documents in relation to a computer genealogy management program.

Steps

These 6 steps will help you begin to organize your family records and documents.

Step 1. Gather together genealogy items you already have.

Place a box in the middle of the floor or somewhere that will catch your attention.

Put genealogy documents, pictures, letters, and anything else related to your genealogy that you can use into the box as you find them.

Step 2. Fill in a pedigree chart with as much information as you can.

Print or buy a pedigree chart. If you want to print a pedigree chart, [click here](#).

Fill in your name and the names of your parents and grandparents. Include birth, marriage, and death dates and places if you know them. Add information about your great grandparents and other ancestors.

For additional information on a pedigree chart and how to use one, see [How Do I Begin?](#)

Step 3. Divide up the items you found by the family surnames of your ancestors and place them in temporary containers.

Label temporary containers, such as shoe boxes or manila envelopes, with the surnames or last names on your pedigree chart. Depending on how much information you have, you may have several containers.

Sort what you have gathered, putting items related to a surname into the container labeled with that surname. For example, label one container with your grandfather's last name (one of your 2 grandfathers), and put items about that grandfather and his family into it.

Step 4. Update your pedigree charts, and make family group records.

Look at what is in each container and see if you can find additional information about births, marriages and deaths of your ancestors. Using the information you find, add any additional names, dates, and places to your pedigree chart.

Make family group records for each family on your pedigree chart. [Click here to print a family group record.](#)

For additional information on a family group record and how to use one, see [A Guide To Research.](#)

If you have a computer genealogy management program, such as PAF 4, type your family information into it. For instructions on how to obtain a free copy of PAF 4 off the Internet, see [Tip 1.](#)

For ways to find and copy family information that has already been compiled into pedigree charts and family group records in a computer genealogy management program, see [Tip 2.](#)

Step 5. Decide how to organize your records into a filing system.

Decide on a way to file your materials. Most genealogists use one of three methods or combinations of these methods:

- File folders.
- 3-ring binders.
- Computer storage.

Step 6. Use your paper filing system and your computer.

Your computer can become a working tool for you. As you research, type new information about individuals into your computer genealogy management program. Also file documents you find about them in your paper filing system(s).

You will be able to use the **Find Individual** (or other similar feature) on your computer genealogy management program to help you locate each individual and see which source documents you have recorded that verify who he was.

Background

This is a time of marvelous computer helps for the genealogy researcher. But researchers ask, "Do I still need a paper filing system?" The answer is a resounding "Yes!" Even though you can

scan a copy of your grandmother's family Bible record or a photograph of her, you certainly want to preserve the originals. No one will live indefinitely, and you will feel very good knowing your family treasures and records are safe and well-organized for the next generation.

Therefore, you need to have both a good paper filing system and a good computer genealogy management program. Various options are available to fill both needs. This overview will give you some basic guidelines and also link you to other helps such as instructions for setting up a basic filing system, web sites with organization information, and a list of books which have helpful suggestions on how to organize your genealogy.

Tips

Tip 1. How do I obtain a free copy of PAF 4?

To download a free copy of Personal Ancestral File 4 (PAF 4) onto your computer, click on **Order Family History Resources** on this screen, and select **Software Downloads - Free**.

Tip 2. Where can I check to see if any of my family information is already in a computer genealogy management program?

You may be able to download or copy your family information onto your computer. Possible sources include:

- A family member who has already typed your family information into a computer.
- Ancestral File has pedigrees and family group records submitted to the Family History Library. To copy these, click on Custom Search, and select Ancestral File. Search for the names of your ancestors.
- Pedigree Resource File is a series of CD-ROMs. To order one of these, click on **Order Family History Resources** on this screen, select **Software Products**, and scroll down the list to select each compact disc in the Pedigree Resource File series.
- Family History Supersearch combines searches of many sites listed here into one search.
- Internet Family Finder has an index to over 100,000 family histories published on the Internet.
- Index to Names in Genealogies on the Web has lists of many sites with pedigrees.
- Genforum searches for living relatives interested in your surnames.
- Cyndislist - Databases, Search Sites, Surname Lists has many sites with pedigrees.
- MultiGen searches 9 online genealogical databases at once.
- Ancestry World Tree has pedigree files submitted by visitors to Ancestry.com.
- RootsWeb WorldConnect has pedigree files submitted by visitors to RootsWeb.
- Kindred Konnections has 22 million names in pedigrees.

For other places with similar information that may or may not be in a computer genealogy management program, see Previous Research, Part 1.

Where To Find It

Internet

The following Internet sites have information on organizing paper genealogy files:

- Cyndislist: Organizing Your Research lists many sites dealing with genealogy organization.
- FamilyRoots Organizer explains family history organization and tools.
- Organization of Genealogical Materials.

- Ancestry's Get It Together Archive.
- Beginner's Guide to Family History Research, Chapter 3: "Organizing Your Family Records, A Filing System."

Family History Centers and the Family History Library

Family History Centers and the Family History Library have FamilySearch in which you can check the Ancestral File and the International Genealogical Index. These programs may give you family information. To use these files, [click here](#).

For information about contacting or visiting the library, see [Family History Library and Family History Centers](#).

Sources

Allen, Desmond Walls. *First Steps in Genealogy: A Beginner's Guide to Researching Your Family History*.

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Whitaker, Beverly DeLong. *Beyond Pedigrees: Organizing and Enhancing Your Work*.

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