

“Building a Research Plan for DNA Testing”

Whenever we approach a genealogical question we need to have a plan before starting our research. DNA is simply another tool in our research toolkit. What is your research goal using DNA? Before you buy several DNA test kits and start handing them out, sit down and make a plan.

- I. The first step is to focus your research. What is the question – what do you want to know? How will you use DNA to answer the question?
 - a. Focused your research on one family line at a time
 - b. Determine what you have and what you need – who has tested already, what tests did they take? Who else could test to answer your question?
 - c. How will you handle unexpected results?

- II. What do you already know?
 - a. Review what (paper) records you have on the family.
 - b. Do you know location and migration pattern of ancestors?
 - c. Who were friends, neighbors, associates? An unexpected DNA connection may show a familial match with a friend/neighbor.

- III. What do you think you will find? Make a hypothesis that will guide your use of DNA.

- IV. Consider what DNA test will answer the question best? Mitochondrial DNA, autosomal DNA or Y-DNA?
 - a. Mitochondrial DNA will look at mother’s mother’s mother’s and so on line.
 - b. Y-DNA will look at father’s father’s father’s and so on line.
 - c. Autosomal DNA will identify both maternal and paternal ancestors but the match is not identified as maternal or paternal.

- v. Who to test? Consider what family members to test.

- vi. Write down your research plan
 - a. Question
 - b. Outline form often works best – fill in as you go along with details
 - c. Write down what you have
 - d. Write down what you still need
 - e. Who are first people to test? Elders priority.
 - f. How will you process results?

- vii. Work Your Plan
 - a. Fill out your family tree - where are the records you need – online, on-ground?
 - b. Reach out to extended family members to test

- viii. Keep track of what you have done - Research Log
 - a. How are you going to arrange results – digital or paper or both?
 - b. Who did you test – names, test type and company, date tested?
 - c. What did you find – relationships in expected DNA range? Surprises?
 - d. What did you NOT find – note who did not test or results not what was expected
 - e. Who do you still need to test to answer your question? Revise/update plan

- ix. Analyze your results – does it make sense?
 - a. Does it answer your research question?

- b. Does the information fit together? Did it fit with family tree information?
 - c. Does the information lead you in a different direction? Unexpected result that suggests different relationships?
 - d. How will you share your results with family?
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- x. Evaluate – Did you answer your question?
 - a. Do you have all you need to answer your question or do you need more?
 - b. Another plan?

Resources:

Bettinger, Blaine. *The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy*. Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2016.

Bettinger, Blaine and Debbie Parker Wayne. *Genetic Genealogy in Practice*. Arlington (VA): National Genealogical Society, 2016.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown (ed). *Professional Genealogy*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001.