

# Get Organized with Research Logs

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Whether you're a beginner or expert genealogist, learn how to create and maintain research plans and logs to maximize your research time and increase success.

## Overview

A research log is a comprehensive list of sources you've already searched or plan to search, including the purpose of each search (what you want to find); a summary of what you did or didn't find; the related person or family and where they lived; notations and source citations; and comments about your search strategies, suggestions, questions, analyses and discrepancies. You can use this important tool to organize and track your research, to prepare for a research trip, or to pick back up after a break.

Research **logs** can help you fine tune your research **plans** and convert them into action items. Your needs for your log may depend on your working style and the nature of your research project(s).

## Basic Steps

1. Decide on a format.
2. Decide what data you'll record.
3. Set up your research log.
4. Maintain your research log.

## Possible Research Logs

- **General Research Log:** an all-in-one solution for your genealogy research.
- **Ancestor Research Log:** a tool for tracking all your research about a single ancestor, if/when putting all your work on one log feels too unwieldy.
- **Repository Research Log:** ideal for logging your work at a particularly library, archive, cemetery or repository, so you can track what you've done and what you still need to do there.
- **Record Set Research Log:** document your research in a specific group of records, such as the 1900 federal census returns for one locality, vital registers from an ancestral parish, or a cemetery transcription project.
- **Miscellaneous Research Logs:** You may decide you want to create logs for correspondence or other types of research. A research log is totally customizable to suite your needs.

## **Formatting Guidelines**

- Searchable
- Ability to sort data
- Portable (use on multiple devices)
- **Options:**
  - Spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel OR table in Microsoft Word  
<https://www.microsoft.com>
  - Spreadsheet or table in Google Drive (good choice for sorting data)  
<https://drive.google.com>
  - As a “Base” in AirTable  
<https://www.lisaalzo.com/airtable> (with this link I receive free credits)
  - As a “Note” using Evernote  
<https://evernote.com>

## **What to Include (Data)**

- Determines the structure of the log.
- Will vary based on needs/preferences.
- One size does not fit all.
- Create your own research logs for different purposes (ancestor research, repository research, special projects, etc.)

## **Suggested Data (Columns)**

- Ancestor/Family Name
- Record/Resource Title
- Information Sought
- Repository or Website
- Outcome
- Source Citation
- Date Logged
- Status
- Notes
- Transcription (Optional)
- Analysis (some genealogists prefer to do this in a separate file or program)

## **Maintaining Your Research Log**

- Possibly the hardest part, but important
- Keep it open on your desktop
- Enter genealogy to-dos that occur to you
- Record library or genealogy website
- Sort log by the Repository/Website column
- Attend to tasks

## Resources

- **Ancestry.com's Research Extract**  
<http://www.ancestry.com/trees/charts/researchext.aspx>
- **Cyndi's List – Citing Sources**  
<http://www.cyndislist.com/citing.htm>
- **Free Genealogy Research Log Template by Lisa A. Alzo**  
<https://www.lisaalzo.com/publications/other-writings>
- **Genealogy on Facebook: List by Katherine R. Willson**  
(search for topics on Organizing Genealogy)  
<https://socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list>
- **Research, Write, Connect** (online course site by Lisa A. Alzo offers self-paced genealogy and writing courses)  
<https://www.researchwriteconnect.com>

## Selected Articles

- **Article: “Using a Genealogy Research Log”** by Lisa A. Alzo,  
*Family Tree Magazine* (US) (Premium subscription may be required)  
<https://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/using-a-genealogy-research-log>
- **“8 Ways to Begin Your Genealogy Journey Using Evernote”**  
Evernote Blog  
<https://evernote.com/blog/8-ways-to-begin-your-genealogy-journey>
- **“Research Logs,”** FamilySearch Wiki  
[https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Research\\_Logs](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Research_Logs)

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