

To Use On-line Trees or Not: Organizing Your Data for Your Purposes

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How do you organize your family tree information? Does it suit your needs? What systems are available that may give you better results? What are your concerns with your family history data? We will examine the common goals and concerns and you can decide how to approach organizing your information for your own purposes as well as how to contribute to a collaborative effort.

Purposes and Goals

- Organize lineage-linked information
- Work with or without internet access
- Conduct research and analysis
- Share family history information
- Write family stories
- Write a narrative genealogy

On-line trees

What are the Pros and Cons to having a tree on-line? Does it fit in with your purposes and goals? Do the benefits outweigh the risks? Are on-line trees the only option?

Lineage-linked software
programs

What are the qualities of software programs that organize your family history and recognize family relationships? (Not a spreadsheet program) Would you benefit from enhanced reports, charts that detail relationships, generation by generation, analysis tools, to-do lists, and research logs? What about LDS Temple work? Do you have privacy or controlled sharing concerns that can be addressed by using a software program?

Privacy

What are your concerns about privacy? Living individuals should *never* appear publicly without their permission as it is not ethical to do so. There are some family situations (adoptions, children born to unwed mothers, divorces, crimes committed, etc.) that may not be common knowledge in a family and should be held privately. What about your research notes – how do you handle your “notes to self” so that others don’t think they are facts?

On-line trees associated with DNA projects can be abbreviated versions of your entire tree and don’t have to include living people. Since autosomal DNA is most reliant in the past five generations, a five- to seven-generation pedigree chart should be enough for your matches to identify which ancestor you have in common.

Shareability

What concerns do you have about sharing your data? Some people feel that it is *their* family and *their* data while others freely share information on ancestors. Realizing that at the seventh generation in our lineage, we each have 128 fifth great-grandparents, or 64 couples. Assuming each couple is unique and not occupying two or more slots on our tree and that they each had ten children who each had as many children, etc., then the number of living descendants for each couple could be over a thousand (times 64 couples for over 64,000 living cousins!). Your ancestry is not really your own but shared with those other descendants. Genealogists traditionally are good about sharing because you don’t know who has inherited the family Bible or photos for your branch of the family. But does the internet change things?

You can choose to share your whole tree on-line, a partial tree, or no tree at all. It is up to you to decide if the shareability advantages to keeping your main tree on-line outweighs other concerns. Or perhaps you only want to put your historic pedigree on-line as “cousin bait” for people to write to you, connect, and share. If you do DNA tests you should put out at least a partial tree going back 6 or 7 generations to aid in connections with matches.

If you decide to not share your family tree on-line, you can still share it with correspondents when you choose to do so. Keeping your main tree in software allows you to create charts, lists, reports, and data files and send them to whoever you wish at your own discretion.

Compatibility with other software

All lineage-linked software programs should have the export feature GeDCom (Genealogical Data

Communication) which is a simple text file that is created from your software when you ask it to export information. It was created to facilitate the transfer of information (not photos) from program to program so that you don't have to retype the information you have gathered on your ancestors. All lineage-linked software programs should understand how to import a GeDCom file and use the information in their format.

In addition, some programs will understand the native data files of other programs without having to go through a GeDCom conversion. This is helpful so that data does not get misplaced in the new software since each program stores the data differently.

There are also other programs and services that utilize GeDCom files, such as charting companies.

Longevity

If you are doing family history just to pass the time that is one reason to work on it. However, most people would like their work to stand the test of time and be passed down as a legacy to future generations. Which organizational systems meet that goal? What can you expect from the system you pick? Will its owner go bankrupt? Will it be discontinued? Will its website disappear as has already happened to some genealogy sites? Software that is stable for now may need to be upgraded when you upgrade your computer. Commitment to keeping your family trees in more than one place is a way to increase the chances that the information will survive.

Collaboration through FamilySearch Family Trees

FamilySearch Family Trees are a collaborative effort to place lineage-linked trees on a website so that the public may collaborate and add to the knowledge about individuals and their family relationships. Even if you choose to keep your information privately, or to not allow sharing of your subscription-based tree, you can help the collaborative effort by contributing your knowledge about your ancestors so that it is preserved in yet another place. If you provide documentation and proof discussions about how you found the correct ancestral relationships, there is much less chance that someone will come in and change it. If you explain your reasoning clearly, they should understand it. Many times, people don't understand how to work with the collaborative tree and confuse individuals just because they don't know how to undo a mistake they made. Whether intentional or not, we can assist the world's knowledge and honor our own ancestors by taking the time to add the facts, documents, and stories that we know about our relatives. Done whenever you have time, you can review one family at a time and make their information correct for future generations to see.

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Software	Free version?	Price	Platform	Integration	*info as of 14 Nov 2018
Family Tree Maker	no	\$79.95	PC, MAC	Sync w/Ancestry; FamilySearch hints	https://www.mackiev.com/ftm
Legacy	yes	\$34.95	PC, MAC w/ Parallels/Cross over	FamilySearch Find A Grave FindMyPast GenealogyBank MyHeritage	https://legacyfamilytree.com
RootsMagic	yes	\$29.95	PC, MAC	Ancestry FamilySearch FindMyPast MyHeritage	http://www.rootsmagic.com
Reunion	Limited demo	\$99.00	MAC only	Searches internet	http://www.leisterpro.com