

Genealogy Begins with a Question

[5 W's and an H]

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The 5 W's and an H:

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?
- How?

I learned these basic questions towards the end of elementary school when we were asked to write book reports. Again, when we needed to do research reports for school projects. Later on in college, these basic questions were again part of class projects/reports. As you note, we also use these basic questions in our genealogical research.

Here are basic questions a genealogy librarian will ask you.

- Who do I want to research?
- What do I want to know about this person/family?
- When and where was he/she born, married, etc.?
- Where did they live?
- Why did the family move?
- How can I find answers?

Some basic questions you should ask yourself -

Who ...

- should I begin my research?
- were his/her parents?
- was his/her spouse?
- were his/her siblings?
- were his/her children?
- should I talk to find these answers?

What ...

- do I know about this person and his/her family?
- types of records should I research?
- types of records were required by the city, county, state, and federal?

Where ...

- can I find these records and/or documents?
- did they live?

When ...

- were birth records required?
- were marriage records required?
- were death records required?
- did court records begin?

Why ...

- should I cite sources?
- should I search for more than one record regarding a date/event?
- do I need to study the history of where they lived?
- should I know what types of records were created where my ancestors lived?

How ...

- should I begin to research my family?
- will I know that I have the correct ancestors?
- should I organize my files/ research?

The 6th W question – Times when you may use “WHICH”

- Just beginning research
 - Which family
 - Paternal or Maternal?
- Confusion
 - More than one person – same name
 - Family Connection
 - Wrong Spouses
 - Extra Spouses
 - Wrong parent(s)
- Conflicts
 - Same records – different dates
- Other

Brand New to Genealogy, OR when you locate new ancestors –

- Which side of the family do you want to begin my research?
 - Paternal or Maternal
- Who do I want to learn more about?
- What do I already know about this person/family?
- How should I keep track of what I've been told/found?
- Who knows more about my family?
 - List specific questions before contacting the individual

Why Review Your Research ...

- What information is missing?
 - Birth, marriage, and/or death dates and locations
 - Obituary/Death announcement - newspaper
 - Parents' information
 - List of children – any missing?

- Who gave you this information?
 - Did they give you a source and/or record of event?
 - Confusion of information?
- How did they get this information?
 - If no sources, do a search for records/sources

Why Review [Double-Check] our Research

- Helps us doublecheck our research.
 - What is still missing?
 - When did I first research this location?
 - New records may have been added to databases.
 - Digitized copies of microfilm now available.
- Updated Web Sites of Historical/Genealogical Societies
- New Sources and Articles added to PERSI
- Digitization – Books, records, and databases added
- DNA discoveries

Why should I add “Potential” in front of an unproven ancestor?

- Marks it as a possible clue.
- Let you know to search/find any record(s) that will prove it is true.