

26 USEFUL MYHERITAGE USER TIPS TO ENHANCE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY



As an expert genetic genealogist and family historian, **Janna Helshtein** has witnessed firsthand the power and potential of MyHeritage in unraveling the mysteries of the past. Here she shares her chosen selection of user tips, useful for both traditional and DNA research

Family history can be an awe-inspiring adventure, leading us through newly discovered paths, breathtaking stories and old photos that give us goosebumps. However, very often when we embark on such a journey, we are so overwhelmed that it feels more like stumbling into a thick and dark forest.

One of the main platforms I use – both to search and to store my research clearly and methodically – is one that has increasingly gained prominence among genealogists and family history enthusiasts, namely MyHeritage.

As an expert genetic genealogist, I have witnessed firsthand the power and potential of MyHeritage in unraveling the mysteries of the past, with its vast collection of historical records, DNA matching capabilities, and

intuitive family tree-building tools. There are many ways one can explore genealogical records and DNA on MyHeritage, and I am happy to share 26 tips I use for researching them both on MyHeritage.

1. Where to start?

Well, open an account: start with a free one, and familiarise yourself with the platform. This will ensure you have an easy journey as you extend your tree as wide and far as you can, while saving you time too.

What do you already know?

These introductory tips are useful pointers for those very new to family history.

MyHeritage's family tree feature allows you to construct and maintain your family tree online.

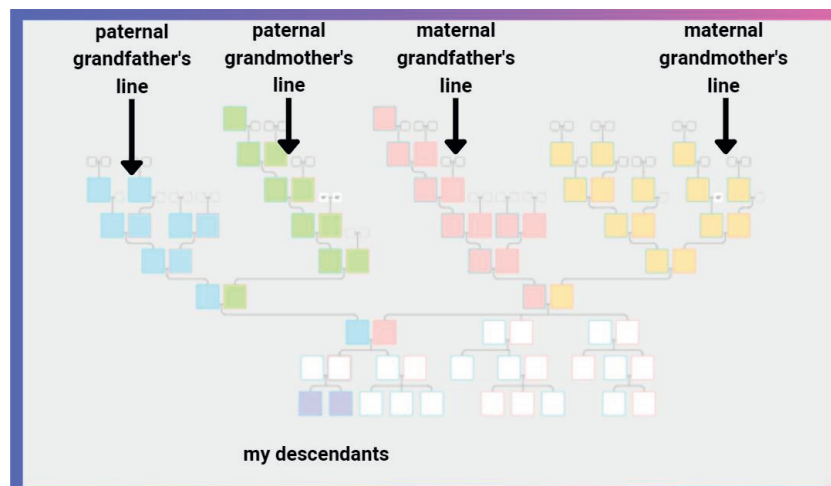
Ask yourself:

- What do you know already?

- What can you immediately add to your tree?
- What do the people around you know?
- Who can you ask?

Genealogical research begins with gathering information. Document your own information, such as birth date, marriage details, and locations. Talk to older relatives and collect information about your parents, grandparents, and other close relatives. Document what you know about each generation.

Every piece of information and evidence is important and might prove to be the missing piece that connects you to an unknown family member, so don't skip what seems to be the small stuff. Together, these details will provide a solid foundation for building your family tree. By methodically adding these details to your family tree from the start, you will be saving yourself time repeating and re-searching for details in the future.

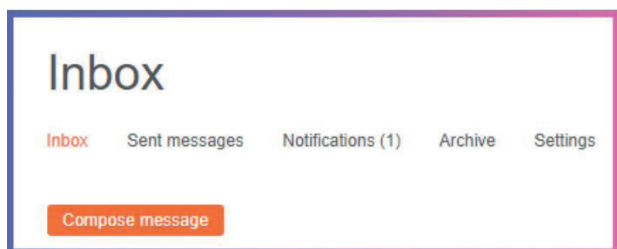


Colour-coded trees

The colour-coding tool on MyHeritage trees makes it easier for you to see at a glance which of the four grandparental branches you are looking at

2. Plant & grow your online tree

MyHeritage's family tree feature allows you to construct a digital representation of your family's history. Be systematic. Start by adding yourself and your immediate family members, then work backward to previous generations. Include names, birth dates, marriage dates, and locations. As you progress, you can add more detailed



information such as occupations, photos, and stories. Building a family tree helps you visualise your ancestry and identify gaps in your research.

3. Colour-coded trees

A touch of color to brighten your day – if you are a visual person like me, you will love this tool!

The Color-Coding tool is now available both in the Family Tree view as well as the Pedigree view, painting all direct ancestors in a given branch in a different color.

These colors cannot be customised and are preset: paternal grandfather's line – blue; paternal grandmother's line – green; maternal grandfather's – red (or rather more pinkish if you ask me) and maternal grandmother – yellow.

The good news is that these colors follow the same pattern whether you are looking at your own tree, or the trees of your DNA matches, making it simple to distinguish and track different ancestral lines, and easier to navigate and understand your genetic connections.

4. Create a research plan

“Plan the dive and dive the plan” is a saying true not only for scuba divers. Create a research plan before diving into your research too.

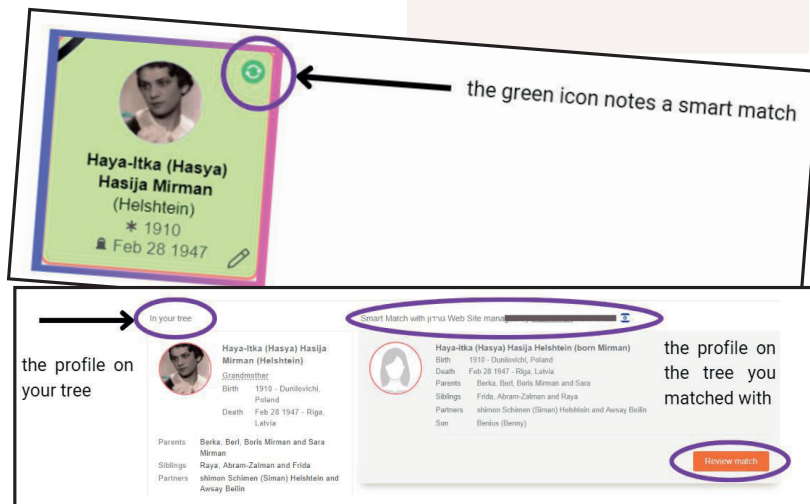
Develop a research plan outlining specific questions, goals, and areas of focus. This will help you stay organised and focused on your objectives. That does not mean that you need to be rigid in your work, just beware of the “squirrel” – that one moment when you are

Collaborate

Make use of the in-built MyHeritage messaging system to contact people researching the same family lines as you

Smart Matches

Keep an eye out for the green icon indicating that you have a Smart Match – indicating that you and a fellow researcher may be researching the same ancestor



Review match

Janna reminds us: do be sure to carefully review the match before adding any details to your tree

tempted to open too many files, and, before you know it, you are down the rabbit hole.

Having a plan makes it easier to get back on track and go on with your research and, if needed, evolve or make a new plan.

5. Collaboration is key

Collaborate with the relatives around you. Use the MyHeritage platform for connecting and collaborating with relatives who may be researching the same family lines.

Use the built-in messaging system to reach out to potential relatives and share information. Collaboration includes engaging with the MyHeritage community on social media platforms such as Facebook (MyHeritage users FB group), Twitter, and Instagram. Engage with other researchers, share your discoveries, and learn from the experiences of fellow genealogists.

Collaborating with others online can lead to the discovery

of new branches, photographs, stories, and documents that enrich your family history.

6. Be smart when using Smart Matches

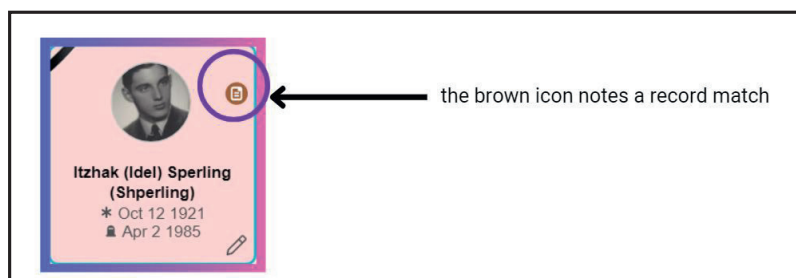
MyHeritage's Smart Matches feature compares your family tree with other trees on the site, millions of them, automatically identifying potential matches. When a match is found, you'll receive a notification with details of the potential connection.

Review and review again these matches carefully. Don't forget that smart matches are clues. It is your responsibility to compare the information and evaluate the credibility of the match before merging the data into your tree. Smart Matches can be invaluable for discovering new relatives and expanding your research beyond your immediate family.

7. Working with Record Matches

MyHeritage has a vast collection of historical records from around

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Record Matches

When following up Record Matches, be sure, as with Smart Matches, to check the records really do relate to your relative

the world. When you add an individual to your family tree, the Record Matches feature searches the database for relevant records related to that person. These records include birth certificates, marriage records, census data, and more.

As with Smart Matches – review and review again. These matches may uncover valuable information about your ancestors, they might verify the details that you have already found – but they may also confuse your ancestor with another person who might have the same name and even come from the same region. Again, it's your responsibility to evaluate the records found before adding them to your tree as facts.

8. A picture is worth a thousand words

Use the MyHeritage platform to upload photos of your ancestors, places they lived, and more. MyHeritage has an extensive collection of historical photographs contributed by users and various archives. Utilise the photo collections feature to search for photos related to your family. These images can provide a visual connection to your ancestors and offer glimpses into their lives.

9. Look close to home

Don't miss out on local collections. MyHeritage has formed partnerships with archives and organisations worldwide, resulting in an extensive collection of local and regional records.

By exploring the local collections related to your ancestor's location, you can access unique records not found elsewhere. These records might include church registers, immigration records, newspapers, and more. They provide context and insights into your ancestors' lives within their specific communities.

10. Read all about it!

Take advantage of MyHeritage's historical newspaper collections: MyHeritage has an extensive collection of digitised historical newspapers from around the world. Search for your ancestors' names or specific events to uncover valuable information. You may often find information about your ancestors' lives that cannot be found in any other record, such as: events they took part in, family disputes, or maybe they visited another ancestor and the details of the event are recorded.

11. Organise & document your sources

Keep track of your research sources, including records, documents, and DNA matches. Use MyHeritage's source citation feature to document your findings accurately.

Knowing the exact source that you extracted your information from will enable you to go back and retrace your steps, as well as compare records and other information – no matter how long ago you found it.

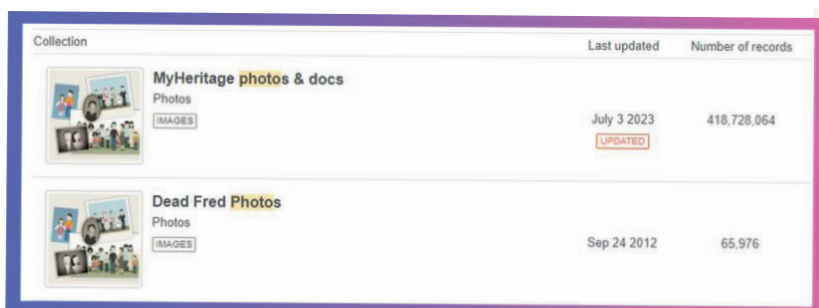
12. Know thy search

Use the MyHeritage search engine effectively: When searching for records or individuals, try different variations of names, alternate spellings, and wildcard searches to maximise your chances of finding relevant results. Take advantage of MyHeritage's support of 42 languages which enables cross-language searching of family members in various parts of the world without worrying about the spelling of names because MyHeritage will explore those possibilities for you.

13. You are never too old to learn something new

MyHeritage regularly organises webinars and workshops on various genealogy topics. These educational resources cover a wide range of subjects, from basic genealogical research techniques to advanced methodologies.

Whether you tune in to the MyHeritage LIVE series on Facebook or tap into the MyHeritage Knowledge Base site, don't miss out on a great opportunity to enhance your research skills, learn new strategies, and stay up to date with the latest genealogical tools and technologies.



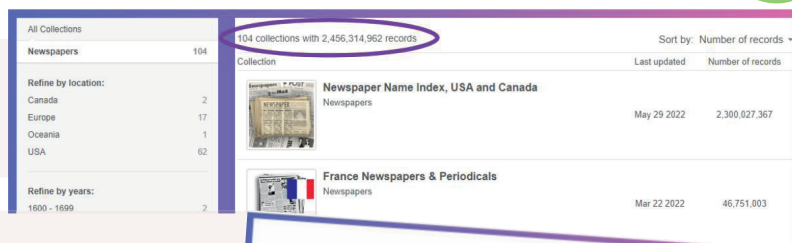
Gather imagery

Explore the MyHeritage photographic collections for items to help bring your family history to life and visualise the past



Explore the catalogue

Look for specific collections available via MyHeritage



Keep learning!

Investigate the MyHeritage Knowledge Base for online tutorials of topics to help you master new skills



DON'T MISS OUT ON A DNA JOURNEY

14. Take a DNA test

MyHeritage offers DNA testing kits that allow you to uncover your ethnic origins and potentially connect with relatives who share DNA segments with you. The process involves ordering a DNA testing kit (watch for those sales), providing a saliva sample, and sending it back to the lab for analysis. Once your results are ready, you can explore the genetic insights they provide.

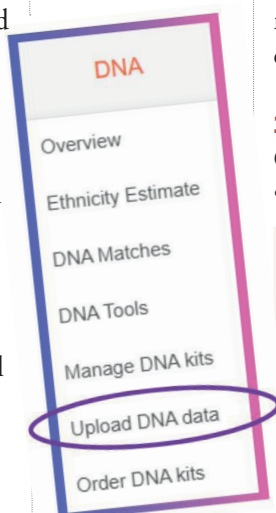
15. Everyone is invited to the party

If you tested with another company (Ancestry, Family Tree DNA FamilyFinder, 23&Me) you can download your file from the company you tested with and upload to MyHeritage to explore your genetic makeup further and find additional relatives.

16. Understand DNA basics

It's important to familiarise yourself with the basics of DNA testing to make the most of your results. MyHeritage offers Autosomal DNA testing, which examines DNA inherited from both your maternal and paternal lines.

Tip! To find out more, visit the knowledge base and search for the DNA topic.



17. Working from the known to the unknown: DNA matches

MyHeritage provides a list of DNA matches that share genetic similarities with you. These matches represent individuals who have also taken a DNA test with MyHeritage (or have uploaded their kit from another testing site) and share segments of DNA with you. You can review your matches and compare family trees to identify potential common ancestors and establish connections. If you have family members who have already taken a DNA test, start with them, and use those to identify whether your unknown matches belong to your maternal or paternal side.

18. Look your best!

Optimise your DNA profile:

- Make sure your DNA

Upload to MyHeritage

If you've tested with another company but would like to get your DNA test results in the MyHeritage DNA database, use the 'Upload DNA data' link to add yours to MyHeritage

profile on MyHeritage is as informative as possible.

- Provide detailed information about your family tree, including names, birth dates, and locations.
- Additionally, include any relevant surnames, ancestral villages, or specific research interests.
- This helps increase your chances of finding relevant DNA matches and potentially connecting with relatives who share common ancestors.

19. Sharing is caring

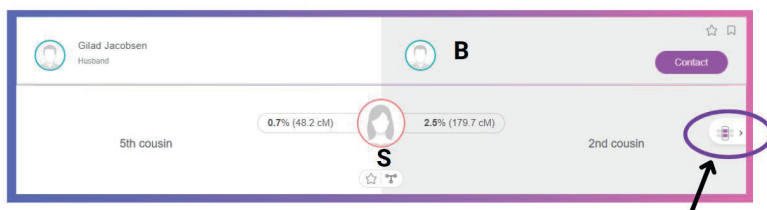
Utilise Shared DNA Segments:

- MyHeritage's Chromosome Browser tool allows you to view shared DNA segments with your matches.
- By examining these segments, you can identify which regions of your genome you have in common with specific relatives.
- This information can provide additional clues and help you investigate shared ancestors more effectively.

20. DNA and Genealogy go hand in hand

When you identify shared ancestors with DNA matches, it's essential to cross-reference

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the information with traditional genealogical research. This means examining the family trees and supporting documentation of your DNA matches to ensure the accuracy of the proposed ancestral connection. Combining DNA evidence with genealogical research strengthens the reliability of your findings.

21. Small icons big difference

When viewing your shared matches with a match, look for the triangulation icon. Triangulation involves identifying DNA matches who share segments of DNA with both you and a known common ancestor. By finding multiple individuals who share specific DNA segments inherited from the same ancestor, you can validate ancestral connections and confirm the accuracy of your research. Triangulation adds an extra layer of confidence to your findings.

22. No need to be a scientist to use theories

One of the groundbreaking tools of MyHeritage is called Theory of Family Relativity (TOFR). This is also a clue, which will need verifying before adding to your tree, yet you may discover it's a very powerful one, saving you hours of work.

When looking at a DNA match, check to see whether MyHeritage found a way in which you might be connected. To create these theories MyHeritage uses the magic combination of millions of family trees together with billions of historical records. This may result in a theory that

jumps from a tree to a record and back to a tree, all with the goal of doing the work for you, attempting to establish how you might be connected to your match. (In May 2023, MyHeritage had a major update to TOFR resulting in more than 136 million theories).

23. Unclutter by clustering

The AutoCluster feature groups your DNA matches into clusters based on shared segments with your DNA match list. This can help you identify common ancestral lines, and help you focus on researching the line you are interested in.

This tool is less helpful if you come from an endogamous population, but I always give it a try, especially if I have further known relatives who have recently tested.

25. Sorting is rewarding

Use MyHeritage's tool of "sort by" – sorting for shared DNA matches. Now, you can decide how to view the long list of shared matches that you have with a certain match.

You can sort the list by the total amount of shared DNA with you, or the total amount of shared DNA with the match you are reviewing. This gives you a clearer picture of the relations between you and other matches in your list among themselves.

26. Please explain it to me like I'm a 4-year-old

The newest MyHeritage DNA tool – CM Explainer, helps you with distant match predictions. To use this tool, you provide the total number of centiMorgans (cM) shared and the ages of the

Have you triangulated?

The triangulation icon will highlight that you and a match share a common ancestor

matches for a more accurate relationship estimate. Visual learners will be pleased to note that MyHeritage provides a diagram in addition to the percentages breakdown to make it easy to visualise the possible relationships for a specific cM amount within a tree diagram.

This fantastic tool is built in with each and every match in your match list but can also be used as an independent tool.

Patience & perseverance

I understand that delving into the world of genetic genealogy can be an exhilarating yet overwhelming endeavor. The abundance of information, complex family connections, and technological tools might seem daunting at first. However, it's important to remember that every genealogist, regardless of their experience, began their journey as a beginner.

Remember, genealogy is a deeply personal journey, and there's no right or wrong way to explore your family history. Take breaks when needed, celebrate your successes, and allow yourself to enjoy the process. With patience, perseverance, and an open mind, you'll find that genealogy has the power to connect you with the rich tapestry of your past and bring a profound sense of fulfillment to your present. 🌱

About the author

Janna Helshtein's journey into genealogy started over 20 years ago, prompted by an innocent question from her (then) toddler about people in the family. This journey took a turn into genetic genealogy, over 8 years ago discovering her ex-partner's biological parents and uniting him with a family he never knew. So, all beginnings were close to heart.

She is the founder of DNA at Eye Level dnaateyelevel.com/en/, and besides helping others in their search for bio-family, she helps the Hebrew-speaking community access the world of DNA through teaching, counselling and public speaking. She believes everyone deserves to know their truth and have the tools to do it at hand.