

Leisa (L): Hello, my name is Leisa

Ella (E): and I'm Ella and we're reference librarians here at the National Library of Australia.

L: Have you ever wanted to start your family history, but you just don't where to begin?

E: It may surprise you to learn that you can start your family tree right from your lounge room or wherever you like.

L: Let us show you step-by-step and if you get stuck, we're always here to help.

E: A good place to start your research is identify what you know about your ancestors.

Here are some questions to get you started: What was your great grandfather's full name?

- Did he immigrate from non-English speaking country such as China?
- Germany or Norway? Did he anglicise his first or last name?
- Do you know your grandparent's birth, death, and marriage dates?
- Do you know which language, social or nation group a previous generation of your descendants belonged to? Did they live on a mission, reserve, or pastoral station?
- Did you know the name of the town your parents grew up in?
- Did your grandparents serve in any wars? What religion did your grandmother belong to?

Once you have identified what you know then you can start to capture details using a pedigree or ancestral chart. We have charts freely available to download or print from our 'Getting Started' section in our Family History research guide. Alternatively, you may like to contact your local historical society. There are some excellent First Nations family tree chart templates that can be downloaded from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (known as AIATSIS) website.

A systematic approach, working backwards from yourself is the easiest way to trace your ancestry. It is best to work from the known to the unknown, one generation back at a time. Start by writing down your full name, date and place of birth, followed by your parent's full names, dates and places of birth, then your grandparent's dates and places of birth on your mother's side then father's side and so forth.

If you are not sure about an ancestor's details, then simply leave the form blank. Avoid guessing and supplying incorrect information. Remember to keep any information about a living person private.

Look over your family history tree chart to work out what gaps need to be filled. Choose an ancestor to discover more about. Plan what records to access and where to locate them. Records created at the time your ancestor was alive will be the most reliable. You may discover your great grandfather's first job hidden in an electoral roll, or your great-grandmother's passenger arrival to Australia, your ancestor's baptism record, or even uncover that missing piece of the puzzle in a newspaper article that solves that family mystery.

Family members can often provide stories, memories, photos, or memorabilia about a deceased family member. You may find someone else in the family has already started the family history or holds documents useful to your research. Birth, death, and marriage certificates can often provide more information about an ancestor and could include things like birth, death and marriage dates, place of registration, family members, age, occupation and much more. Certificates can be purchased from relevant state or territory Birth, Death, or Marriage Registry Offices. We have more information about this on our website.

Libraries and Archives can hold an array of documents and records in a variety of formats including online, print and microform. Search National, State, and local Libraries and Archives websites to discover family history resources they hold. Family History databases can contain a range of digitised records and indexes searchable by your ancestor's name. Contact your local library to find out if they subscribe to any databases.

When you have hit that research brick wall, there are places that can help. Family history societies have expert knowledge in different aspects of family history and offer ongoing research support. Many societies provide workshops and hold local collections or indexes relevant to their area. Search online or contact your local shire council to find a society near you. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Family History Unit provides family history research assistance for First Nations people particularly families affected by the stolen generation. Visit the AIATSIS family history page for more information.

For extensive or ongoing family history research, you might like to hire a private professional researcher. You can find a list of researchers on our website. You can find our Family History research guide under the 'Using the Library' then 'Research tools and resources' located at the top of our homepage. Our 'Ask a Librarian' reference service provides research assistance at any stage of your family history research. So, if you have a family history question, you can get in touch with us by filling out the Ask a Librarian online form. You can also chat to us over the phone, mail us a letter or simply visit us and talk to one of our friendly librarians in the reading room.

Good luck and happy researching!