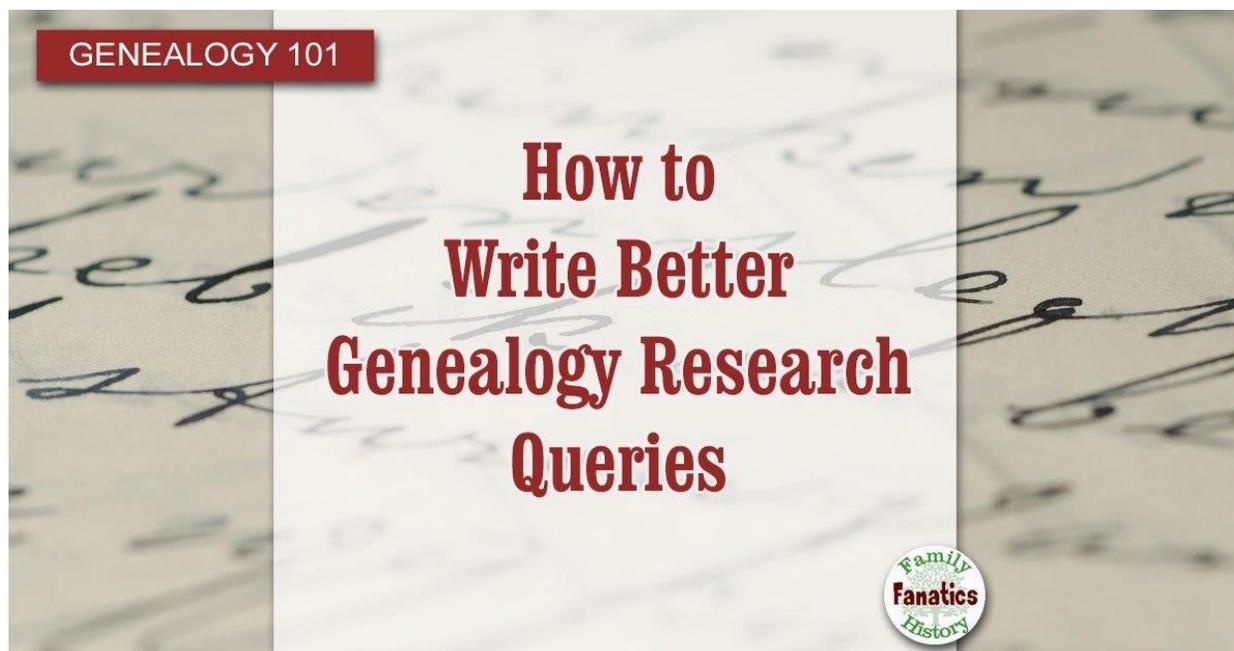


# How not to ask for help with your research query?



Many folks involved in genealogy research love to help you with your research questions. However, there is a right way and a wrong way to ask for that help. The following is not it and I'll explain why.

*“Hello, I have posted once before, and no one responded. This is my second post. I am looking for a Francisco Maynard. His children were in Rochester, New York. He came there from the eastern end of New York. His wife is Lydia. I have found 3 different Franciscos who have wives named Lydia. One in Buffalo, one in Batavia, and one in Rochester. Can anyone help me figure out which one is mine?”*

One might think this is an innocent query, but it's really asking for a tall order for volunteers. First, a volunteer must research the three potential men. They, they must determine which Francisco is yours.

Folks hire genealogists, such as my friends at [Legacy Tree Genealogists](#), for this type of work. If you want volunteers to do this, you need to help them out and do some the first step by yourself. They can help you evaluate what you find.

## Start by giving background details for your research question

Give enough details about the first person that someone can address the ultimate question. Additional details may include the approximate birth year, birthplace, occupation, and the name of his children (and that's just off the top of my head). Clarify which person you're trying to expand upon before you ask someone else to tell you which out of a set of possibilities belongs to you.

## Explain where you are at in the research process.

Volunteers like to assist in your research and it's deflating to hear that you've already searched in a record they have found for you. Therefore, relate which records you have found. A volunteer will likely double check your research, but that's acceptable.

Back to the Francisco query, finding three men could mean you did a quick query on an online database and you're trying to evaluate results. Perhaps your question then becomes, “Which result should I search?”

If you have found three men named Francisco in a variety of sources but the details conflict and create confusion, your query becomes, “How do I sort this conflicting information out?” In other words, you want assistance evaluating evidence.

It's essential to report where you are in the process. Otherwise, you're trying to get free research, and few people will respond to such queries.

## Write a more specific research query

It may seem the questions ‘which is mine’ is specific but compare it to:

- What records am I overlooking?
- How much weight should I give to the death record?
- Is it possible for one man to be in two places during the 1920s?
- Given where I'm at in the research process, would you conclude that the Batvaia Francisco is the mostly likely of the three candidates?

If you cannot ask a specific question, then you should consider hiring a professional researcher, go to a genealogical society meeting, a genealogy library, or find a family history consultant to help you get to the heart of your question.

## How I got help for my research query

When I requested help for my brick wall ancestor, Agnes Anderson, I wrote the following:

*“I am trying to learn more about Agnes Anderson. Agnes was born in Howard County, Missouri in 1881. She died in Columbus, Ohio on 22 May 1820. She never married but had one daughter, Marie Anderson, born 21 May 1820.*

*Agnes appears in the 1900 Census record in St. Louis, Missouri. In the 1910 and 1920 Census records, she is living in Newark, Ohio. Yet, I have not found a birth record in Howard County, Missouri for Agnes.*

*I think her parents are Wm Anderson of Sweden and Amanda Sparks of Licking County, Ohio. These names appear on Agnes's death record. I am wondering, should I believe the death record for Agnes when the informant was recorded as “hospital records?”*

Notice how I wrote the birth date and place and death date and place for Agnes Anderson? Next, I detailed the census records where I had found Agnes. Then, I included the fact that I could not find a birth record in Howard County, Missouri. Finally, I asked my specific question, “should I believe the death record when the informant is hospital records?”

A volunteer intrigued by the case took a peek and quickly informed me about something I did not know – that Agnes Anderson had two death records and the second might have the clue I needed to answer my question.

## Three steps for writing a better research query

If you're not getting responses to your queries, then follow these three steps:

1. Give background details
2. Explain where you are at in the process
3. Ask a specific question