

AI Basics for Genealogy: Take-Home Sheet

Every prompt worth keeping, ready to copy and paste, at one free address. No sign-up, no app.

simplehelpers.com/family-history/

① The one rule underneath all of it

AI is a research assistant

You are the researcher

The record is the source

AI predicts what is likely. It does not verify what is true. It can read a record in seconds, and it can also invent a name, a date, or a whole "source" with total confidence. Every answer is a lead to check against the original. Never cite the AI. Cite the record.

② Start here (all free to begin)

Open any **one** of these in your web browser. Type, talk (tap the microphone), or upload a photo of a document. You never need more than one.

- **Claude** · claude.ai · the writer's pick for stories
- **ChatGPT** · chatgpt.com · planning and brainstorming
- **Gemini** · gemini.google.com · good with photos and audio

Type the address yourself. Don't click the ad. Lookalike sites put "Gemini" or "ChatGPT" in big letters and a \$0.99 trial that becomes \$40 a month. The real ones are free and never ask for a card to start. If the address bar doesn't match, close it.

③ Your first assignment: one obituary, four questions

Do this one first. Find an obituary for someone in your tree (a letter, a clipping, or a diary page works just as well), paste it into the assistant you picked above, and ask these four one at a time. Each answer feeds the next, so don't skip ahead.

Please read this obituary and create a chronological timeline of the key events in this person's life. Include every date, place, and person mentioned.

Now write a short biographical paragraph based on this timeline. Write it as a story, not a list. Use only the facts provided.

What was daily life like for someone in this occupation, in this place, during this time period? What challenges would they have faced?

Based on this person's life, what additional records might exist that I haven't mentioned? What should I search for next?

④ Two more you will use the most

Read handwriting you can't make out. Photograph the page, upload it, and ask:

Please transcribe this handwritten document exactly as written. Mark any words you are uncertain about with [?]. Do not correct spelling or modernize the language.

Read a record in another language. Latin, German, Swedish, Italian: same idea. Add: "*Then give me a plain-English translation, list every name, date, and place, and note anything you are unsure about.*"

Get unstuck on a brick wall. Say what you know and what you already tried:

I'm researching [PERSON], born about [YEAR] in [PLACE]. What I know: [3 to 6 facts]. What I've tried: [searches]. Suggest the record types most likely to help, where they are kept, and 5 concrete next searches.

Build a research plan for a whole county. Turn on *Deep Research* mode first, give it ten minutes, then check every link it hands you. Some will be dead, and a few will never have existed.

What genealogical records exist for [COUNTY, STATE] between [YEARS]? For each one, tell me who holds it, whether it is online and where, and whether it needs a visit or a written request. Give me a numbered research plan.

⑤ AI is already inside the sites you use

FamilySearch Full-Text Search · free · AI read the handwriting in millions of deeds, wills, and court records that were never indexed. Search a name and find your ancestor as a witness on someone else's record. More languages coming through 2026.

FamilySearch AI Research Assistant · free · the box on your signed-in home page that says it found new ancestors. Those are record hints that could extend a line. Review the record image before you attach anything.

Ancestry · with a subscription · *AI Ideas* (suggestions from your tree), *Full Text Search* (beta), *AI Stories* (a record read aloud as a story), *Photo Insights* (dates a photo from clothing and print style). Some "findings" are your own tree data read back to you. Read the reasoning.

MyHeritage · free account · *Scribe AI* reads, translates, explains, and dates a document, gravestone, or photo, but a free account gets only about two images. *Enhance, Repair, Colorize, Restore Colors* and *Animate* are free and far more generous. *Live Memory* needs a subscription. Records and trees need a subscription.

⑥ Free extras that make people gasp

Gemini Notebook · notebook.google.com · upload your own sources (a life history, a stack of wills, a county history) and ask questions. It answers *only* from what you gave it and links to the exact line it used. It will also make a two-voice "podcast," a mind map of who connects to whom, and a briefing you can hand a cousin. Free allowance. (Was NotebookLM until July 2026. Same tool.)

Transcribe the old tapes · upload a recording of Grandma talking to Gemini or ChatGPT and ask for a transcript with speaker labels and timestamps. Free allowance on both. Then paste that transcript into Gemini Notebook, above, and ask it questions.

Google Lens · in the Google app · point your phone at a photo: read the inscription, name the medal, guess the decade.

Colorize or repair a photo · ask Gemini or ChatGPT: "colorize and repair this photo, keep the faces exactly as they are." Free and beautiful, but it repaints the picture; faces, framing, and any writing on it can change. MyHeritage tints the original instead. Keep the original. Neither is evidence.

Reimagine · phone app only · search your app store for **Reimagine: Scan & Enhance Pics**, from MyHeritage, and sign in with your MyHeritage account. Photograph a whole album page and it finds, straightens, and saves each photo separately. It carries the same tools as the website except Live Memory, on the same free limits. There is no website version, and **re-imagine.app** is a different company selling AI room design.

Chronicling America · loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america · 20+ million free newspaper pages. Find the clipping, then paste it into a chat assistant to clean up the faded print. The rest of the Library of Congress is at **loc.gov/collections**: photographs, maps, letters, and recorded voices, all free.

David Rumsey "Text on Maps" · davidrumsey.com · search a surname or place and find it lettered on a historic map.

OldMapsOnline · slide an old map over today's.

DeepL · deepl.com · for *typed* foreign-language records, still better than the chat assistants on German, Polish, Dutch, French, and Italian. Free up to a length limit.

⑦ Four questions to ask of any AI feature

- **Does it show its reasoning?** If it won't say why, you can't tell analysis from guesswork.
 - **Is it reading the record, or reading my tree?** If you typed it in yourself, it isn't evidence. It's an echo.
 - **Does it change its mind?** Run it twice on the same item.
 - **Is it right about things I can check?** Test it where you know the answer before trusting it where you don't.
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⑧ Ask better, stay safe

- **Be specific:** the person, the place, the decade, what you already tried.
- **Tell it to work only from what you gave it.** Add "use only this document."
- **Ask how sure it is.** "Flag anything you are inferring. Where do sources disagree?" Then check the source it names.
- **Names, dates, and places are where it slips.** Check those against the original every time.
- **Living people stay out of it.** Don't paste details about living relatives, or your whole family file, into a free chat tool. MyHeritage makes you agree to this before Scribe AI will run: your upload is processed by MyHeritage and by Google, and no photos of living people without their permission.
- **Keep going.** "I already tried that. What else?" "Shorter and warmer." It is a conversation, not a search box.