

Four Family History Stages

Editor's Note: Thanks to Stan Kivett of BYU-Idaho for the initial conversation that sparked this article.

One of the missions of The Family History Guide is to get more people involved in family history worldwide. You could say we want people to "get in the swim of things" and enjoy the experience. Let's take that swimming metaphor a bit further and see how it might apply to family history participation.

Stage Zero: Sitting on the Pool Deck

We've all been there, and maybe some of us still are. We watch the excitement and fulfillment that others are experiencing in family history, yet we just can't bring ourselves to get in the game.

Here are a few of the common "swimming fears" we might be having:

- Genealogy is too difficult (I don't have the swimming skills, or the water is too cold).
- I don't know where to start (I need a new swimsuit, or I don't want to jump in).
- It's too time-consuming (I don't have the time to get really good at swimming).
- There are plenty of experts already doing genealogy (the pool looks crowded to me).

We'll get back to these fears a bit later, after we explore the other stages.



Stage One: Feet in the Water

So curiosity got the best of you, or maybe a friend offered to help you get started with your family history. This can be exciting, or it can be overwhelming—if it feels good, you'll work on getting to the next stage, but otherwise you will likely hop back out of the pool. Sadly, too many people experience the latter, and it may be years before it feels right to get involved again.

Stage Two: Wading

This is the most critical stage, and that might sound surprising at first. Why isn't it all about Stage Three: Swimming (sorry to spoil the surprise)? The fact is that most people have a sweet spot of available time—if circumstances are right, they can get deep enough into family history to get some important and satisfying work done, but not so deep that it requires more time and effort than is reasonable.

Stage Three: Swimming

This where some of us are, many of us wish we were, and some of us believe we will never get to: becoming a skilled and proficient genealogist. Yes, the rewards are great, and yes, it does take quite a bit of time and effort. But as we'll see shortly, family history is not an all-or-nothing endeavor. You can work it in degrees. Let's see how.

Strategies

Take a moment to think about the Stage Zero fears we discussed earlier—too difficult, too time-consuming, etc. Part of the problem is this: *we think that getting into family history means we are going to be thrown into the deep waters of research.* That's enough to scare most would-be swimmers away from the pool.

Instead, we need to be comfortable with, or help others be comfortable with, moving from Stage Zero (poolside) to Stage One (feet wet) to Stage Two (wading). And yes, some of us will become Stage Three swimmers, if time and circumstances allow.

The Goal

Currently, the swimming pool picture of family history looks something like this:

- Poolside—extremely crowded
- Feet in the water—moderate numbers
- Wading—sparsely populated
- Swimming—very sparse

Here's what it *should look more like*:

- Poolside—crowded, but moving
- Feet in the water—increasing and moving
- Wading—the largest group; a great "party" experience
- Swimming—still a bit sparse, but growing

How The Family History Guide Helps

The Family History Guide can be a wonderful vehicle for helping you grow between Stages. The Intro section has tools for beginners; the Projects help you wade through the right information to help you get your family history tasks done; and there are plenty of article and video links to keep the most avid researchers happy.

The unique instructional design in The Family History Guide makes it easier to

- Get "in and out of the family history pool" with less hassle. You can accomplish meaningful objectives in as little as 15 minutes. This is key for those who have limited time to spend and need consistent results.
- Have more success in the Stage you are in, from "feet wet" to "swimmer".
- Move between Stages confidently. There are helpful steps to follow, exercises to complete, and a complete Tracker system to help you monitor your progress.

Additionally, The Family History Guide has a complete [Training Section](#) that helps consultants and instructors guide others through the learning process.

What Stage are you in with your family history? Do you have friends or family you wish were more involved? See the difference [The Family History Guide](#) can make for your journey, and for those you care about.