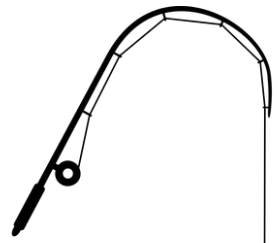


## Hook 'em & Reel 'em In: Getting Your DNA Matches to Respond



How do we get our DNA relatives to bite when we cast a hook into their genealogical pond? Giving them enough information to show you are worth their time, but not so much that you get nothing in return is a balancing act. I think the initial contact with your matches is so important that it is worth scripting and saving to be used multiple times. This will require having a few different versions based on what you know about the person you are contacting.

### Friendly

Even though you may be sending the same message to many different people, those who receive it should feel like you are writing to them. Keep in mind that they may be:

- Older or younger
- College-educated or not
- Poorer or wealthier
- DNA savvy or beginners

Your letter should be easy to read, avoiding jargon and slang. Make it just enough to convey the critical information but not so long that it makes them put off reading it until they have more time.

### Helpful

What do you have to offer those you are contacting? The answer could be:

- 1<sup>st</sup> hand knowledge of an ancestor who you both are related to.
- A well-documented tree that you are willing to provide limited access to.
- Original documents, like birth, marriage, death, or naturalization certificates.
- The family bible that has generations of your shared family's history.

Decide what you are willing to share with a stranger.

### Kind

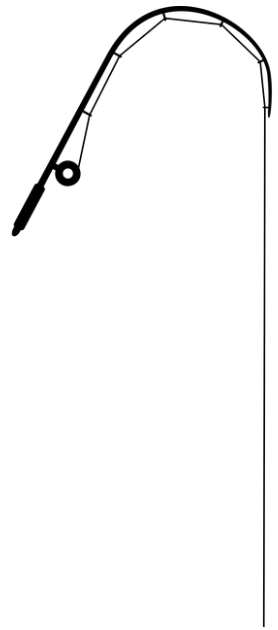
Will everyone who reads your email feel good about your request? Think of different:

- Ages
- Ethnicities
- Geographic regions of America or the world.

On the next page are two samples that roughly say the same thing but could be perceived differently by the recipient. Words in **red** indicate things that would be customized depending on what you know about how you match.



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1. Hi **Fred**, I see that we match at Ancestry.com with 261 cM – OMG – that’s great! I think we match on our **Parks** line, but I don't know who your people are. I have researched the **Parks family from Little Rock, Arkansas, through several towns across Tennessee, and back to Amelia County, Virginia, and into Sandhurst, Berkshire, England, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.** Were your people in any of these places? As you can see, I’ve done my research, so let me know if you need my help making sense of all of this. I’m sure I can elucidate any genealogical conundrums you are facing. Would you be willing to share information with me?

Best, Sylvia

2. Hi **Fred**, I see that we are close DNA matches on Ancestry.com. I think we match on our **Parks** line, but I don't know which set of parents you belong to. I have researched the **Parks family from Arkansas, through Tennessee, and back to Virginia and England.** Were your **Parks in Arkansas or Tennessee in the 1800s?** Please let me know if you have any specific research questions that I can help you with. Would you be willing to connect with me so we can share information?

Best, Sylvia

Hopefully, comparing these two versions will help you craft one or more templates for your correspondence. If you are contacting a match from a site that uses kit numbers, you should include the kit numbers for you and your match when you mention the site. The person you contact may be an administrator for more than one kit (like me).

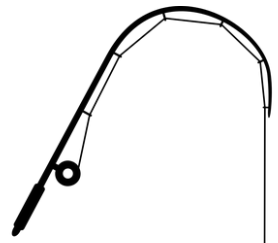
### Persistent & Patient

Try, try, try again! Don't take it personally when you don't get a response (they probably don't know anything about you). Here are some reasons people may not respond:

- They don't know where to view messages. DNA sites may have internal messaging that can only be viewed when you are logged in. If your match is unfamiliar with the internal messaging, they may not know you want to connect. Some sites have a direct email option for contacting matches.
- They don't log in to their account regularly. Some people take a DNA test and never look after the initial results are posted.
- They got busy.
- They don't have/check the email address they signed up with (my brother did that)
- They discovered a family secret and are trying to figure out their past and future.
- They got mistreated by another DNA match.



# Hook 'em & Reel 'em In: Getting Your DNA Matches to Respond



## Respectful & Responsible

Like elsewhere in life, there are ethics related to DNA testing. Just because you can do something does not mean it is ethical. The Golden Rule says to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. You likely would not want your match to broadcast all the family information you shared, so don't share what they give you access to. Ask if you can update your tree with the details they shared.

Many people are discovering they are not related to the family they have always known. It can be painful for everyone involved. Practice compassion with these individuals while they work through the process.

Remember, even though they are DNA matches, they are also strangers. You should not share information about living family members without their permission and knowledge. If they ask personal questions about you or your family, please be careful what you share.

## For best results:

- First, download your family tree, referred to as a GEDCOM (Geneological Data COMmunication), from the site where you have your most accurate family tree.
- Second, link your GEDCOM to your DNA test results for the advanced tools to work – it is slightly different for each company, but each site can step you through the process.

## Summary across major DNA sites:

- 23andMe.com
  - Internal messaging, plus name & location.
- Ancestry.com – most popular DNA testing site
  - Internal messaging & ancestry.com username
- FamilyTreeDNA.com
  - No internal messaging, but email address and name are available.
- GEDMatch.com
  - No internal messaging, but email address and username are available.
- MyHeritage.com
  - Internal messaging, plus name & some location information.
- LivingDNA.com
  - Internal messaging, plus name & some location information.



# Hook 'em & Reel 'em In: Getting Your DNA Matches to Respond

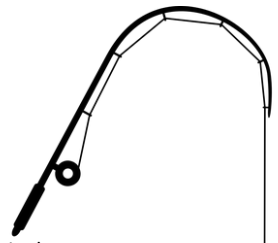


Image courtesy of kristi4PE @ pixabay.com

There are additional ways to search for matches if you are not getting any response. Be careful doing this because, in my opinion, it borders on cyberstalking. The reality is, we all have publicly available information that can be used to differentiate us from others with the same name.

- A username is often used in multiple places, so the username someone uses on Ancestry.com may also be used on other DNA sites.
- Search Public Member Trees on Ancestry.com for the name or username of your match. Emailing the owner of the tree is sometimes more effective.

## Additional Resources

Adoption Network Cleveland, article “Messaging DNA relative: suggestions for sending a message that will get a response” <https://www.adoptionnetwork.org/news-events/archive.html/article/2020/02/18/messaging-dna-relatives-suggestions-for-sending-a-message-that-will-get-a-response>

Blaine T. Bettinger, *The Genetic Genealogist*, lots of free resources  
<https://thegeneticgenealogist.com>

Family History Daily, article “Ready to Contact Your DNA Matches? Here’s What to Say (and NOT to Say),” <https://familyhistorydaily.com/genealogy-help-and-how-to/contacting-dna-match/>

FamilyTreeDNA blog, <https://blog.familytreedna.com/contacting-dna-matches-strategies/>

ISOGG Wiki has the most understandable accurate and up-to-date information about all matters related to genetic genealogy. <https://isogg.org/>

Diahan Southard, *Your DNA Guide*, lots of free resources <https://www.yourdnaguide.com/>

Dr. Penny Walters, author of *Ethical Dilemmas in Genealogy*, available on Amazon and elsewhere. She lectures extensively, so watch for her topics to pop up.  
<https://www.searchmypast.co.uk/>

