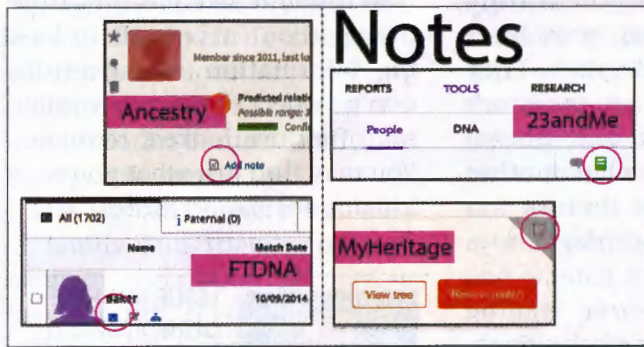


Diahan Southard Looks at Ways to Organize Your DNA Results



When I was a kid, I collected Berenstain Bear books. I spent hours categorizing and alphabetizing the books and spinning through bookstore racks hoping to see one I didn't yet own. My favorite Berenstain Bear book is *The Berenstain Bears and the Messy Room*. It is really the final page in the book, showing Brother and Sister Bear's closet full of neatly labeled and stacked boxes that was literally the stuff dreams were made of for me. I love organization. So naturally, I want a way to organize my vast new collection of DNA cousins.

The very best and very easiest thing you can do that will lead to fewer repeated searches, and thus a more productive session with your genetic genealogy test results, is to simply use the notes field provided by each testing company. The notes field at FTDNA and MyHeritage are accessible right from the main match page, while at AncestryDNA and 23andMe, you have to first click on your match to edit your notes (though in AncestryDNA, you can view notes you have made from the main match page). What should you write in these notes? Here are some must-haves, and some nice-to-haves within your notes:

Must-have: your known or suspected connecting ancestor. At the very least, say which side of the family they are on, if known. Record the date you contacted them, and if they responded. 23andMe makes this easy by showing you all of your correspondence with that person right there on the page. At AncestryDNA, you can click on the link in

the upper right corner of the match page to see your previous messages.

Nice-to-haves: the total amount of shared DNA. This is really applicable only to AncestryDNA, where you can't see the total amount of shared DNA from the main match page. If you make a note of it, you can have ready access to it on the main page.

There is no question that corresponding with your matches is a huge part of this genetic genealogy process. While many may not respond for a variety of reasons, many do, and you need to keep track of that correspondence. One idea is to move your correspondence as soon as possible away from the constraints of the testing company's email brokering service. Create a separate email address just for your DNA correspondence and direct all of your matches to talk to you there. Use the folders and tags within your email program to help you quickly find a desired correspondence. I would also encourage you to copy the key points of correspondence into a Word document. I know oftentimes I get an email with a lot of information, but there are only a few points I want to focus on. Instead of needing to read through a long email each time I am looking for information about a particular ancestor, I can just turn to my word document and find just the information I need, often saving time and frustration. Whatever your system, just stick to it and you will feel less overwhelmed at the prospect of keeping track of your thousands of cousins. ☞☞



Growing up with the budding genetic genealogy industry lead **DIAHAN SOUTHARD** to her current position as Your DNA Guide, where she provides personalized, interactive experiences to assist individuals and families in interpreting their genetic results in the context of their genealogical information. She is also the author of the Genealogy Gems DNA Quick Guides, available from the *Your Genealogy Today* store.