

Handout: Preserving the Past with Tomorrow's Tools

How to Use This Handout

This handout is meant to support today's presentation and help you practice later at home. You do not need to understand everything today. Keep this as a reference and try one small task at a time.

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

AI is technology that enables computers to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence — like recognizing handwriting, translating text, or spotting patterns in large data sets.

Key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Broad concept of machines performing smart tasks.

Machine Learning (ML): AI that improves as it processes more data.

Deep Learning: A type of ML using layered networks to solve complex problems.

Token / Context Window: Tokens are word-pieces; the context window is how much text you can paste in—key when adding long obits or timelines.

Agents: Models that call utilities (OCR, web search) or follow multi-step plans—useful for repeatable workflows.

Generative AI (GenAI): AI that creates new content — text, images, audio, or code.

AI in Everyday Life

Netflix: Suggests shows based on your viewing habits.

Google Maps: Predicts travel times using traffic data.

Voice Assistants (Siri, Alexa): Understand and respond to voice commands.

AI in Genealogy Today

Record Search & Hints: Ancestry, FamilySearch, and MyHeritage use AI to suggest possible family connections.

Document Explanation: MyHeritage's ScribeAI transcribes and describes historical documents, photos, and records that are difficult to read.

Photo Restoration: Tools like MyHeritage's Photo Enhancer restore faded or damaged images. *Handwriting Recognition*: AI can transcribe old

Handout: Preserving the Past with Tomorrow's Tools

census and church records. *Translation:* AI can translate documents in Latin, German, Polish, etc.

Photo Dating: MyHeritage PhotoDater estimates when a photo was taken

Practical Genealogy Applications

Breaking Brick Walls: Ask AI for strategies to find missing relatives.

Storytelling: Turn records into short biographies.

Data Cleanup: Standardize names, dates, and places.

Image Work: Restore or colorize old photos.

Tips & Guardrails

Verify Results: Always check against original sources.

Privacy First: Avoid uploading sensitive living data.

Use Prompts Effectively: Example — 'Summarize this 1880 census record in plain English.' Treat AI as an Assistant: Not a replacement for genealogical proof standards.

Getting Started

Free Tools: ChatGPT, Google Gemini, MyHeritage Photo Enhancer, NotebookLLM

Paid Options: ChatGPT Plus, MyHeritage Complete Plan.

Looking Ahead

Automated transcription of parish registers.

AI-driven ancestor stories.

Integration of AI into genealogy databases.

References & Resources

MyHeritage AI Tools: <https://www.myheritage.com/deep-nostalgia>

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org>

National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/research>

Cyndi's List on AI: <https://www.cyndislist.com/ai>

Handout: Preserving the Past with Tomorrow's Tools

Genealogy & AI: Quick Prompt Card

Use these ready-to-go prompts with AI tools (ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, etc.)

Prompt 1: Data Cleanup

“Here is a snippet from my GEDCOM file: [paste GEDCOM text]. Please identify duplicate individuals, standardize names and dates, and highlight any missing birth or death information.”

Prompt 2: Brick Wall Research

“I cannot find the parents of [Ancestor's Name], born around [Year] in [Place]. Suggest possible record collections or strategies to research their parentage, and explain why each option might be useful.”

Prompt 3: Photo Help

“Restore this old photograph by removing scratches and blemishes, sharpening faces slightly, and enhancing clarity — but do not change clothing, background, or colors.”

Prompt 4: Storytelling

“Turn the following facts into a short, readable family story for my relatives: [paste key dates, places, and events]. Write it in a warm, narrative style, about 2–3 paragraphs.”

Prompt 5: GEDCOM Quality Assistant

“Role: You are a GEDCOM quality assistant.

Task: Normalize dates (DD Mon YYYY), places (Town, County, State, Country), and flag duplicates.

Context: Paste small GEDCOM snippets (limit to a few families at a time).

Constraints: Do not invent data; suggest merges with reasoning; output a change log.

Output: Table: Field | Original | Suggested | Rationale; plus Flags: Duplicates, Conflicts.”

Prompt 6: TEMPLATE

- Role: You are a professional genealogist who follows the Genealogical Proof Standard.
- Task: Build a step-by-step research plan to answer this question: <paste your question>.
- Context: Known facts (bulleted), timeline (dates/places), and prior sources checked.
- Constraints: Cite likely collections and repositories; note gaps and risks.
- Output: Sections: Hypothesis, Priority Sources, Search Strategies, Next Steps.

Handout: Preserving the Past with Tomorrow's Tools

Tips

Be specific about names, dates, and places.

Keep tasks short and focused.

Use AI as a research assistant, not a final authority.

Links

<https://www.openai.com>

<https://www.gemini.com>

<https://claude.ai>

<https://copilot.microsoft.com>

<https://www.notebooklm.com>

<https://www.myheritage.com/photo-enhancer>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/genealogyandai>

<https://aigenealogyinsights.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/genealogyandai>

<https://alpha.school/>

Fun YouTube Movies

https://youtu.be/WXuK6gekU1Y?si=5K_5Bv_aZd7m8gdx (Google DeepMind: AlphaGo – The Movie)

<https://youtu.be/d95J8yzvjbQ?si=N6w6uumWL53i1j8z> (Google DeepMind: The Thinking Game)