8 Tips for Using AI as Your Genealogy Assistant

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Generative AI: Creating Novel, Human-Like Content

Generative AI is a groundbreaking technology that can create entirely new and original content, such as text, images, music, and more. Unlike traditional AI systems that are designed to analyze and process existing data, generative AI focuses on producing novel outputs that closely resemble content created by humans.

The primary goal of generative AI is to create content that is so convincing and logical that it could be mistaken for human-made creations. By training on vast amounts of data and learning the underlying patterns and structures, generative AI models can produce text that reads like it was written by a person, images that look like they were captured by a photographer, or music that sounds like it was composed by a musician.

This remarkable ability to generate human-like content opens a world of possibilities across various fields, including genealogy. Generative AI has the potential to assist and enhance human creativity, streamline content creation processes, and inspire new ideas and innovations.

Let's explore seven ways AI can serve as your ultimate genealogy assistant, making the process of analyzing historical records and sharing family stories more efficient and effective than ever before.

Role #1: Research Assistant

How can AI help as a research assistant?

- **History Helper:** AI can break down important historical events and laws, making it easier to understand your ancestors' lives.

- **Document Decoder:** It can explain tricky documents and terms in simple words, making them easier to grasp.
- **DNA Detective:** AI can help you make sense of DNA topics, such as mitochondrial mutations and X-DNA inheritance paths.
- **Jargon Buster:** AI can clarify confusing genealogy terms and ideas, making them easy to understand.
- **Number Cruncher:** AI can help you understand the math side of genetic genealogy, like probabilities, standard deviations, and statistical analysis related to DNA studies.

Remember: Like humans, AI can make mistakes. Always check its work!

Example Prompts
- My great-grandfather was a farmer in Kansas. What can you tell me about these machines? [Included a family photo.]
- In relationship terminology, explain once or twice removed
- Explain the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS)
- As part of the GPS, give an example of analysis & correlation

Role #2: Information Summarizer

AI takes large amounts of text or data & quickly condenses it into a shorter, more manageable form. Some sources of text or data include newspaper articles, census data, pension files, blog posts, & probate records.

Why Summarize?
- **Time-saving:** Quicker to read a summary than a long text.
- **Efficiency:** Can help quickly identify the main points or conclusions of an article, enabling us to decide if it's worth reading in full for more details.
- **Learning & Comprehension:** Summaries can aid in understanding and retaining essential information, especially when dealing with complex or technical subjects.
- **Memory Aid:** Returning to a lengthy article after some time can be daunting; a summary provides a quick refresher on the content without the need to reread everything.

Example Prompts
- You are an expert historian and genealogist and well-versed in law & land issues. Summarize what happened in the following newspaper article.
- Summarize this blog post using bullet points.
- Can you explain how to use this tool per the info in the blog post?

- Summarize this pension file for Rheinhard (spelled various ways) Kaechle. Include any important details & dates.

Role #3: Data Extractor

AI can process large volumes of data & efficiently extract specific information like names, dates, figures, or facts. Some sources of text or data include newspaper articles, census data, pension files, blog posts, & probate records.

Example Prompts
- Extract all the names from this newspaper article. Highlight their roles & relationships. Use a bullet list to organize.
- In what ways could you summarize this will? Answers:
    - By beneficiary
    - By land inherited
    - By neighbors
- Create a detailed timeline based on the pension file

Role #4: Writing Assistant

What can generative AI help you write?

- Emails
- Blog posts
- Research reports
- Family histories
- Personal memoirs

How can AI help you edit your writing?

- Identify and correct spelling and grammatical errors
- Ensure consistency in tone and style
- Highlight instances of passive voice
- Pinpoint unclear sections
- Suggest alternative words or phrases for better expression
- Help expand on ideas or condense lengthy passages without losing essential information
- Assist in organizing your thoughts
- Generate outlines for your writing
- Provide inspiration for new content ideas

Example Prompts

- Highlight any grammatical or spelling errors or anything confusing in this paragraph

- Write a factual narrative about Reinhard & his wife, Mary [given a timeline]

- Rewrite this sentence so it doesn't end in a preposition

- Make this sentence grammatically better

Role #5: Text Transformer
3 Ways AI Can Process & Enhance Your Text

- **Text Transformation**: This involves changing the style, tone, or complexity of written content. AI can make text more formal or informal, adapt it to sound like a particular dialect or speech style (like a "valley girl" or Shakespeare), or adjust it to suit a specific audience or purpose.

- **Optical Character Recognition (OCR) with Generative AI Enhancement:** AI can convert images of typed text into editable and searchable text. Generative AI takes this a step further by filling in missing words or letters and making intelligent guesses when a word doesn't make sense, resulting in more accurate and complete transcriptions.

- **Handwriting Recognition (HWR) with Generative AI Enhancement:** AI can convert images of handwritten text into editable and searchable text. Similar to OCR, generative AI enhances HWR by filling in missing words or letters and making educated guesses when a word is unclear or incomplete, leading to more reliable and readable transcriptions.

Example Prompts

- Rewrite as a Shakespearean drama.

- You are an expert at transcribing newspaper clippings. Transcribe this newspaper clipping word for word and line for line.

- You are an expert at reading handwriting and transcribing it. Transcribe this handwriting word by word presenting it line by line starting with "the testimony…"

Transcription Tips

- Be aware that AI occasionally "hallucinates," meaning it may generate text that is not actually present in the image. Always double-check the transcription against the original document.

- If the AI struggles with transcribing an entire document at once, try breaking the image into smaller sections for better accuracy.

- AI generally performs better with neat, legible handwriting and may struggle with difficult-to-read scripts, similar to human transcribers.
- When asking the AI to transcribe a document, request a "line-by-line" transcription to preserve the original line breaks and formatting.
- To improve the AI's transcription accuracy, preface your request by stating that it is an "expert at reading handwriting" or an "expert at transcribing [specific document type, e.g., newspapers]."

Role #6: Tech Support Specialist

Generative AI acts as a 24/7 tech support assistant, helping you navigate and troubleshoot various software applications and platforms. It provides quick answers to your questions and offers step-by-step solutions to make your tech tasks more manageable.

Try getting help with:

- **Microsoft Office**: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook
- **Google Workspace**: Docs, Sheets, Slides, Forms
- **Design and media tools:** Canva, Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Premiere Pro
- **Web development:** WordPress, HTML, CSS, JavaScript
- **Genealogy software:** RootsMagic, Family Tree Maker, Legacy Family Tree
- **Project management and productivity:** Trello, Asana, Notion, Airtable
- **Communication and collaboration:** Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype
- **Social media and online platforms:** Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube
- **Payment and financial tools:** PayPal, QuickBooks, Xero
- **Screen capture and recording:** Snagit, Camtasia, OBS Studio
- **Mobile devices**: iPhones, Android phones, tablets
- **Hardware and peripherals**: Printers, scanners, routers, monitors

Example Prompts

- In Microsoft Word, how do I get a footer that gives me the page number out of a total number of pages? (ex. X of XX pages)
- How do I make a shortcut in Word 365?
- I saved a Zoom video today, but I'm not sure if I saved it to my computer or the cloud. Do you know how I might track down the video recording?
- How do I get a new page to show up using WordPress?
- Using Excel, how do I calculate the standard deviation for second cousins?
- In Canva, how do I change a rectangular project to a square?

- State whether you're on Windows or a Mac
- Share which version you're on
- Explain if your view looks different
- Ask more questions until you get a solution

Role #7: Visual Illustrator

Why use AI-generated images in Genealogy?

- Enhance Storytelling
  - Create engaging visuals for presentations and blog post
  - Bring ancestors' stories to life through illustrations
- Develop AI Skills
  - Learn how to communicate effectively with AI tools
  - Gain experience with AI technology that may become increasingly relevant in genealogy research
- Engage Younger Generations
  - Illustrate children's books to spark interest in family history
  - Create interactive, visual content to appeal to younger audience
- Encourage Creativity & Exploration
  - Have fun experimenting with AI-generated images
  - Discover new ways to represent and share family history

When using AI-generated images for genealogy, keep the following in mind:

- **Historical Accuracy:** AI-generated images may not always accurately represent historical events, clothing, or settings. It's essential to verify the generated content against reliable historical sources.
- **Authenticity:** AI-generated images should not be presented as authentic historical images. Always clearly label them as AI-generated illustrations to avoid confusion or misrepresentation.
- **Limitations:** AI models may struggle with generating images of specific individuals or complex scenes. Be aware of these limitations and adjust your prompts accordingly.
- **Ethical Use:** Ensure that the AI-generated images are used ethically and do not perpetuate stereotypes, misinformation, or offensive content.

Example Prompts

Historical Events

- Show a battle scene from the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812
- Illustrate a scene from the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904
- Illustrate a family living in a house on the prairie in the 1880s

Family Stories

- Gave it a newspaper article about a fire in 1916 and asked it to illustrate it
- Illustrate a farmer with his pet bear in the early 1800s

Additional Resources

https://www.reuters.com/legal/legalindustry/who-owns-ai-created-content-surprising-answer-what-do-about-it-2023-12-14/

AI Bloggers & YouTube Channels to Follow

Leeds, Dana. *Dana Leeds.* YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/@danaleeds

Leeds, Dana. *Genealogy with Dana Leeds*. Blog. https://www.danaleeds.com/

Little, Steve. *AI Genealogy Insights*. Blog. https://aigenealogyinsights.com/author/digitalarchivst/

McCulloch, Carole. *Carole McCulloch GeneaBlogger*. YouTube Channel. https://www.youtube.com/@essentialgenealogist2024

Videos

Little, Steve. *Artificial Intelligence and Genealogy: New Beginnings in 2024*. Webinar, *Legacy Family Tree Webinars*. https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/artificial-intelligence-and-genealogy-new-beginnings-in-2024/: 2024.

Little, Steve. *Empowering Genealogists with Artificial Intelligence 6 September 2023*. Webinar, National Genealogical Society. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npQaRJbzE1s: 2023.

MacEntee, Thomas. *AI and Genealogy: Trouble Ahead?* Webinar, *Legacy Family Tree Webinars*. https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/ai-and-genealogy-trouble-ahead/: 2024.

Book

Mollick, Ethan. *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI.* New York City, New York: Penguin Random House, 2024.