



Talk to Your DNA Matches Like a First Date

When you reach out to a DNA match for the first time, think of it like a first date. No, not in a kissing-cousins sort of way. Rather, think about the *goal* of a first date.

DIAHAN'S
TIPS

Perhaps it's been awhile since you've been on a first date....It has for me, too. (I've been married for 21 years.) But I have teenagers. We talk quite a bit about dating. From what I gather, there is still just one main purpose for a first date: to connect, and decide if you want a second date.

Why would you want to connect with your DNA matches?

EXCHANGE GENEALOGY GOODIES Your relatively close matches—like second or third cousins, those whose relationships you can figure out from your family trees—may have family pictures, stories or documents that you don't. And vice-versa: you may also have some to share.

COLLABORATE ON RESEARCH Some DNA matches may share your genealogy curiosity. You may want to put your heads together to see what family mysteries remain unexplored (or unexplained).

LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR MATCH You likely have some DNA matches who haven't posted any family tree information. These are the ones for whom this guide is written.

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You don't have to contact **EVERYONE** on your list. Just those you're curious about identifying and your **Best Matches**.

Who are your Best Matches? I thought you would never ask. A Best Match is someone who is related to the question you are asking your DNA to help you solve. How do you know if a particular DNA match is a Best Match? I outline this process completely in [Your DNA Guide - the Book](#). But in brief, if your DNA match is [sharing DNA](#) with another match you know is related to the link you are looking for, then they are a Best Match.

Because this Best Match does not have a family tree posted, you'll need to write them a note and invite them to share some family information with you. If they don't have a tree you may help them [see how easy it is to make one](#). Remember, all you need from them is the name of ONE deceased family member. After that, you could potentially make the tree yourself. After all, you are a genealogist!

So keep this one goal in mind as you think about your correspondence with your DNA match: **“What can I say to get them to write back?”**

These tips for crafting that first contact come from basic concepts of human nature and relationships:

Start with their name Everyone likes the sound of their own name, but in this case it provides a dual purpose. Many people administer more than one DNA account. So if you write to them with a question and don't specify which DNA match you are talking about, their first reply back will be to ask you who you are asking about.

Keep it short This is not the time to fill them in on your last 20 years of genealogy research or to wax poetic about your favorite ancestor. Remember, this is not about you, it is about them, and finding out what they know.

Ask a simple question Keep your questions general and try to ask them something many people would know off the top of their heads. Keep your locations and names general. Stick with counties and states and surnames, not streets and full names.

Don't mention centimorgans Please, for the love of all that is good in this world, do NOT quote how much DNA you are sharing, or, heaven forbid, which chromosome you are sharing it on. Remember, this is a FIRST DATE. Genealogy and genetics are intimidating for most people. You don't need to bog them down with scientific details.

Give them an easy action item Remember, your whole goal here is to get them to write back. So end your note with something simple like, “Even if you don't know anything about your family, please just write back and let me know you received my note.”

How about I help you get some ideas flowing? Here is a sample letter you may want to write to your DNA match:

Dear [name or username],

It is good to meet you here at [name of testing company]. I am amazed at the things I have been able to find out with my DNA. I'm trying to learn more about my [grandfather, great grandmother, etc]. I think you can help, since we share some DNA. Whatever you might be willing to share about your family tree could help me build mine. If you have a family tree, would you be willing to share it with me? Or could you tell me the names of your [parents/grandparents] and where they were from? Even if you don't have time for this right now, or if it makes you uncomfortable to share information, could you please just reply and let me know you received my note?

Best,

Your Name

DIAHAN'S TIPS

Why aren't my DNA matches

responding? With the exception of Family Tree DNA, all of the DNA testing companies are brokering your emails. That means your message won't come directly from YOU; your testing company will deliver it. Your match may not be paying attention to emails from their testing company.



Keep Track of Your Mail

As you begin to write to your DNA matches, it is important to stay organized. Every company allows you to take notes about your DNA matches, so take advantage of that feature! Write down the date you reached out, and then note any response you get.

Once you strike up a conversation, try to move your correspondence away from the DNA testing company mailbox and into direct email. That way you can stay in touch, and they're more likely to see your follow-up messages. You may even want to set up a new email address just for your DNA correspondence. Then you can use folders and tags to keep track of the email you receive.

How often should you reach out? There aren't any set rules here, but I wouldn't be afraid to contact my matches every couple of months or so. Consider offering up some bread crumbs (if you can), such as, "I have learned some things about our shared Tennessee heritage and have collected some old family photos. I would be happy to share them with you, if you are interested."

In general, I have found that most people DO want to connect with you, but they may be hesitant to engage with you because they just don't feel like they know very much about DNA or family history, or both! So keep this first date mentality in mind and do whatever you can to make your matches feel like they want to reply to your message.

YOU CAN DO DNA--AND WE CAN HELP.

Start—or continue—your DNA journey with Diahan Southard at Your DNA Guide. [Sign up for our free monthly email newsletter.](#)

Your specific DNA questions will take you down a unique path. There's a bit of a learning curve and you may sometimes find yourself at a dead end, not knowing where to turn next. Chart your course with step-by-step plans—customized road maps for your DNA journey—in [Your DNA Guide - the Book](#) by Diahan Southard.