



*Teaching
Genealogists AI™*
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Getting Started in Genealogy

Module 4 – Keep a Research Log

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Organization: Puerto Rican Genealogy Group

Website: <https://puertoricangenealogy.org>

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Estimated Time: 30–45 minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will:

- Understand why keeping a research log is essential
- Know what to record for every search you conduct
- Understand the importance of recording negative results
- Be able to write a simple source note for anything you find

- Know how to use the Google Sheets Research Log template
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Why Keep a Research Log?

A research log is a record of where you searched, what you found, and what you did not find. It is the single most important habit you can develop as a beginning genealogist.

Without a log, you will:

- **Search the same place twice** without realizing it
- **Forget where you found something** and be unable to go back to it
- **Lose track of what didn't work**, which is just as important as what did
- **Struggle to pick up where you left off** after a break from research

Think of it this way: Your research log is your field notebook. A scientist writes down every experiment, even the ones that fail. A genealogist does the same.

What to Record

Every time you search for a record – whether you find something or not – write down these four things:

1. Where You Searched

Be specific. Not just “FamilySearch” but the exact collection or database.

Too vague	Better
FamilySearch	FamilySearch, “Puerto Rico, Civil Registration, 1885-2001,” Rincón, Nacimientos 1900-1910
Ancestry	Ancestry.com, “1930 United States Federal Census,” Rincón, Puerto Rico
Google	Google search for “Vargas family Rincón Puerto Rico”

2. What You Found

Describe the record briefly. Include names, dates, and any key details.

Example: *Found birth record for Juan Vargas Rivera, born 15 March 1905 in Barrio Pueblo, Rincón. Parents: Pedro Vargas Colón and María Rivera Santos. Record #47, page 24.*

3. What You Did NOT Find

This is called **negative evidence**, and it matters. If you searched a collection and your ancestor was not there, write that down.

Example: *Searched FamilySearch, “Puerto Rico, Civil Registration,” Rincón, Marriages 1900-1910. Did not find a marriage record for Juan Vargas Rivera.*

Why does this matter?

- It prevents you from repeating the same search later
- It may mean the event happened somewhere else (a different *pueblo*) or under a different name
- It may mean the record was never created, was lost, or hasn’t been digitized yet
- A pattern of absence can itself be meaningful evidence

4. Your Source

Write down enough information so you (or anyone) could find that exact record again. A simple format:

Who created it, “Title of the collection or record,” **specific location within it** (volume, page, entry number); **where you accessed it** (website, archive); **date you accessed it**.

Example:

Puerto Rico, Registro Demográfico, “Rincón, Nacimientos, 1905,” entry 47, page 24; digital image, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org>); accessed 17 February 2026.

You don’t need to be perfect at citations right now. The important thing is to write down enough that you can find the record again.

A Simple Research Log Format

Your research log can be as simple as a table. Here is the format used in the companion Google Sheets template:

Date	Ancestor	Search Goal	Where I Searched	What I Found	Source/Citation	Next Step
2026-02-17	Juan Vargas Rivera	Find birth record	FamilySearch, PR Civil Registration, Rincón, Nacimientos 1900-1910	Birth record found: born 15 Mar 1905, parents Pedro	PR Registro Demográfico, Rincón Nacimientos 1905, entry 47, p.24; FamilySearch; accessed 17 Feb 2026	Search for parents’ marriage record

Date	Ancestor	Search Goal	Where I Searched	What I Found	Source/Citation	Next Step
2026-02-17	Juan Vargas Rivera	Find marriage record	FamilySearch, PR Civil Registration, Rincón, Matrimonios 1920-1930	Vargas Colón and María Rivera Santos Not found	—	Try church records for Rincón; check neighboring pueblos

Getting Started With Google Sheets

If you have a Google account, you can create a free research log using Google Sheets:

1. Open <https://sheets.google.com>
2. Click **Blank spreadsheet**
3. Name it: “My Family Research Log”
4. Create the column headers from the table above: Date, Ancestor, Search Goal, Where I Searched, What I Found, Source/Citation, Next Step
5. Start logging every search you do from today forward

See the companion file “**Google Sheets Templates**” for detailed specifications for three templates: a Family Information Tracker, a Research Log, and a Document Checklist.

Common Beginner Mistakes

Mistake	Why It’s a Problem	What to Do Instead
Not recording negative results	You’ll search the same place again and waste time	Always log “not found” with the specific collection and date range
Writing “found on internet”	You won’t be able to find the record again	Record the exact website, collection name, and date accessed
Only logging successes	Gaps in your log hide gaps in your research You’ll forget details within days	Log every search, successful or not

Mistake	Why It's a Problem	What to Do Instead
Waiting to "organize later"		Log immediately, even if it's rough – you can clean it up later

Your Turn: Log Your First Search

Try a search right now and log it:

1. Go to <https://www.familysearch.org>
2. Search for one ancestor from your Module 1 worksheet in a Puerto Rico collection
3. Log your results below, whether you found something or not:

Date: _____

Ancestor I searched for:

Collection I searched:

What I found (or didn't find):

Source note:

My next step:

Reflection Questions

- How does it feel to write down "not found"? Remember: a documented absence is valuable information, not a failure.
- Do you see how the "Next Step" column keeps your research moving forward?
- Could you share your research log with another family member or researcher so they could understand what you've done?

What's Next

Congratulations – you've completed all four modules of **Getting Started in Genealogy!** You now have:

- A written record of what you know about your family (Module 1)
- Interview notes from living relatives (Module 2)
- Knowledge of where to find Puerto Rican records for free (Module 3)
- A research log to track your progress (Module 4)

Keep Going

- **Review the Quick Reference Card** for a printable summary of everything you've learned

- **Set up your Google Sheets templates** using the specifications in the companion file
 - **Visit** <https://puertoricangenealogy.org> to connect with the Puerto Rican Genealogy Group community
 - **Share your progress** – tell us what you’ve discovered!
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