

Surnames and DNA

by Susan C. Meates (DNA Advisor, Member 3710)

Surnames in the DNA Project

The surnames included in your DNA Project start with your one-name study surnames. The DNA Project Profile is where these surnames are listed, separated by commas. The commas are mandatory, and avoid anything else in this section.

A potential participant can **only** find the DNA project if the surnames are listed in the DNA Project Profile. The search algorithm is based on this data. Listing surnames anywhere in the DNA project description or DNA project website will not result in the project being found by the search algorithm. For potential participants to find your project, all the relevant surnames must be listed in the DNA Project Profile.

In addition to the core set of surnames of your one-name study, you can optionally include additional surnames, such as to investigate possible variants and/or surname evolution. These additional surnames do not require additional work, and do not increase your one-name study. If participants find the project or you recruit participants for these exploratory surnames, you would request a direct male line from the participant, and perhaps check it. If they are unable to supply any genealogical information beyond their father or grandfather, you would decide if you would spend the time to research their direct male line, to uncover the most distant paternal ancestor.

Having both the core set of one-name study surnames and some exploratory surnames opens the door for potential future discoveries.

For example, with the Ricketts DNA Project, there is both a core set and an exploratory set of surnames:

One-name study core surnames: Ricketts, Rickat, Ricket, Ricketts, Rickett, Rickit

Exploratory surnames: Rackett, Ragget, Raggett, Reckitt, Rocket, Rockett, Wreckitt, Wreggitt

For both sets of surnames, the one-name study and the exploratory DNA surnames, these are surnames that exist today, not forms from the past that didn't survive.

Those that have been working on their one-name study for a while may have run across possible candidates for surname exploration that they can add to their DNA Project. Those in the early stages of a one-name study may want to do some research, such as searching databases using wildcards for where the vowels in the surname occur, to see if any surnames in the search results look like candidates for exploration, or maybe forms that arose due the Great Vowel Shift change of pronunciation. Surname distribution mapping is also useful in determining which surnames to add to the DNA Project beyond the core of the one-name study surnames. No one is required to add additional surnames beyond their one-name study.

Exploratory surnames can be added over time, just as some members change or increase their registered surnames over time.

Migration, both within the British Isles, and to other countries, could have had an impact on the evolution of a surname. One starting point is to include surnames in the British Isles where there is a probability of surname evolution, before considering migration destination surname evolution, which often followed a different evolution path.

In the end – these are all your decisions, just as you decide the amount of time you devote to your one-name study and you decide the approach you take. Perhaps it makes more sense for your DNA project to focus on the one-name study surnames and testing all the trees before adding surnames. Each one-name study is different. The benefit to adding exploratory surnames early in the process is that you could find out in the future that they are taken. You can add these surnames now, so they are there for participants to find the project.

Why Have a DNA Project?

The number of Guild members with DNA Projects has been steadily increasing. New members often join already having a DNA Project.

If you haven't taken the plunge yet – here are the typical concerns and some information to address the concern.

1. It is too difficult and complex.

DNA testing for genealogy appears difficult on the surface, since there are some terms and concepts to learn. In reality, it is no more difficult than many record sets. As with anything new, there is a learning curve.

2. I don't have the time.

You manage the amount of time you spend. Starting now enables you to make sure your one-name study surnames aren't taken, and you can wait for participants to come to you until you have more time available to recruit.

3. I am not comfortable with asking someone to test.

The hardest one is the first one. After that, it keeps getting easier. If you have contacts from your one-name study, you may be surprised at how interested they are in making discoveries.

4. I know they are all related, so I don't see a benefit.

Supporting your genealogical research with DNA testing would benefit your ONS, and could be very interesting and might lead to surprising discoveries.

5. Some of my trees only have one surviving male.

This situation makes it urgent to get a DNA Project started, so you can get their result while they are still here.

Want to Get Started?

When you are ready to add DNA to your one-name study, the DNA Advisor is here to help, including setting up your project with proven marketing material. Simply write to: DNA@one-name.org. You will receive a completely setup project, that you can modify, along with an easy to follow 20-step Getting Started email and a sample recruiting email and letter. ■