

Should I Take A DNA Test Elsewhere? Or At All?

Diahan Southard

Your DNA Guide

Author of *Your DNA Guide—the Book*

Creator of Your DNA Guide—the Academy

Many of you reading this will have already taken a DNA test. But should you take another one? And what if you want to test one of your relatives? Which DNA test should you buy for them?

Before we dive headlong into your questions, let's consider the question that many people, including your relatives, still have: should you be DNA tested at all? We will talk about 3 things to consider before taking a DNA test:

1. Do you really want to know?
2. Getting proper informed consent using forms like [this one from Blaine T Bettinger](#) or [this one from Debbie Parker Wayne](#)
3. Information and Inspiration are the keys to asking a relative to test (including a discussion about [privacy](#) and company policies).

OK, now for you - do you need to test at multiple DNA testing companies? The real question is: can another DNA testing company be better/more effective at helping me find my ancestor?

When evaluating that company, we will talk about five main components:

1. Sample Collection: saliva or cheek swab
2. Ethnicity Estimates: insights into your ancestral locations
3. Database Size and Geographic Reach
4. Genealogy Tools
5. Genetic Tools

[See my comparison of the Big 5 DNA testing companies](#)

Inspiring DNA Stories:

[Finding a biological grandfather using AncestryDNA and MyHeritage tree connection](#)

[Testing at multiple companies to explore English birth roots](#)

Ethnicity Estimates

Perhaps the biggest reason that people purchase a DNA test, the ethnicity estimates are meant to give you insight into your ancestral locations. These results are heavily dependent on the reference populations used by the testing companies. Each company is using different reference populations, so understanding what those populations are can greatly impact your understanding of the results. In addition to these results, more specific and accurate geographic origins information is delivered in the form of [AncestryDNA Communities](#) and [MyHeritage Genetic Groups](#).

Database Size

If you want to do family history research, the key will always be finding that one DNA match (or 10!) who connect(s) you to a previously unknown ancestor. You should test with the company most likely to have that particular DNA match: the company with the largest testing pool, and/or a company that sells tests in the countries where you hope to find matches.

Genealogy Tools

Only two of our companies are doing an excellent job of providing us ways to integrate our genetics and our genealogy: AncestryDNA and MyHeritage. This makes sense, as both companies have extensive record collections and massive online connected family trees, which provide an almost endless source of information with which to integrate our DNA results.

At Ancestry, their tree reconstruction tool is called [ThruLines](#), and at MyHeritage it is called [The Theory of Family Relativity](#). Basically these tools offer you ideas of how you and your matches might be related to each other. These tools are both excellent resources for your genetic genealogy efforts and should be reviewed carefully. But remember, these are just hints, and need to be double-checked!

Genetic Tools

When working with our DNA matches, all of our companies have the most important tool: the [Shared Matches Tool](#) (called In Common With at FTDNA, and Relatives in Common at 23andMe). This tool allows you to gather together individuals who are all sharing DNA with each other. Theoretically, these individuals will share a common ancestor with each other, allowing you to make genealogical discoveries.

There are other genetic tools that our companies are offering to help further the work of genetic genealogy. Here are some of those tools and how they might help.

Chromosome Browser

A [Chromosome Browser](#) is a tool that allows you to see the actual locations that you share with your match. For the most part, it doesn't matter where you are sharing with someone, only that you are sharing. However, some genetic genealogists like to track the actual locations shared. If you are one of those that likes these sciencey things, go for it! But just be careful that you aren't reading too much into the shared segments, as some segments are just very common, and don't necessarily indicate a shared recent common ancestor.

Relationship Estimates

While each company gives you a relationship and relationship range to accompany your match, AncestryDNA has gone one step further and is providing you with a list of relationships and their probabilities based on your DNA match strength. This tool can be a valuable resource to help you see how you might be connected with another DNA match.

A very similar tool is available for use with any DNA testing company data, and is courtesy of Blaine Bettinger. It is called the Shared Centimorgan Project. Find out more about this tool on my website at www.yourDNAguide.com/scp.

Matches of Matches

A very important aspect of understanding your connection to your matches is seeing their connections to each other. We can see this most easily at MyHeritage DNA as part of the Shared Matches tool. For example, I might see that Jim is my second cousin, and we both share DNA with Pam. Pam is also listed as my second cousin, but is listed as Jim's sibling. This really helps me better understand how Pam and Jim are connected - especially if only one of them has a tree posted!

23andMe also provides this information as part of their Relatives in Common tool, and FTDNA provides a very limited view of the matches of matches in its DNA Matrix tool.

Summary

All the testing companies discussed here have the potential to impact your family history. They are all reputable, and all offer tools that can help your search to find and document your family. Ultimately, you would want to test at all five! But it only takes one match to break your family history research wide open, and you just don't know where that one match may have tested.

What's next for you? Get our free email mini-series!

[Yes, I've already tested: Free email mini-series on what's next](#)

[No, I haven't tested yet: Which DNA test should I take?](#)