Ancestry Library Edition (ALE) Quick Reference Guide

Essential strategies, account comparisons, wildcard rules, and card catalog secrets for genealogy researchers

> **Golden Rule of Ancestry Library Edition: Save As You Go!**
>
> ALE is a **read-only database with NO Personal Shoebox or Tree Storage**. You cannot bookmark records to sort out later or attach them to an online tree while at the library terminal. Always click the green **"Save"** button on document view to **email files to yourself** or save to a **USB Flash Drive** before logging off.

1. ANCESTRY ACCOUNT OPTIONS COMPARISON

Account Type	Cost	What You CAN Do	Record Access
Free Guest Account	Free	Build & edit family trees, receive hints, message members, upload media & GEDCOM files.	Index-only & free collections (e.g., Find a Grave, 1880 Census).
U.S. Discovery	Paid Sub.	Full tree functionality + access to all U.S. records, censuses, vital stats, & military files.	All U.S. Collections.
World Explorer	Paid Sub.	All U.S. features + international records from 80+ countries (UK, Europe, Canada, Mexico).	Global & International.
All Access	Paid Sub.	All World Explorer features + full subscriptions to **Newspapers.com** & **Fold3**.	Global Records + Partner Sites.
Library Edition (ALE)	FREE AT LIBRARY	Search billions of records, view public trees, download/email records, print charts & forms.	Core Global Archives (Census, Vital, Passenger lists).

2. CARD CATALOG POWER TIPS

BYPASS THE "GLOBAL SEARCH" CLUTTER

Homepage searches query billions of mixed records, producing thousands of irrelevant results. Navigate to **Search > Card Catalog** to isolate one specific collection at a time.

TITLE VS. KEYWORD SEARCH BOX

- **Title Box:** Use for known collection names (e.g., `1950 Census`, `WWI Draft`, `Passenger Lists`).
- **Keyword Box:** Use for topics, religions, or regions (e.g., `Bavaria`, `Methodist`, `Wills`, `Naturalization`).

FILTER BY LOCATION & CATEGORY (LEFT SIDEBAR)

Drill down using the left sidebar: **Country → State → County**. This isolates localized databases (e.g., county land records or tax lists) hidden from global search.

SORT BY "DATE ADDED" OR "RECORD COUNT"

Change the catalog sort order (top right) to **Date Added** to discover newly digitized records, or **Record Count** to find the largest collections for a region.

3. ADVANCED WILDCARD SEARCH TECHNIQUES

ASTERISK (`*`) & QUESTION MARK (`?`)

- `*` = 0 or more letters (e.g., `O'Don*ll` → *O'Donnell, O'Donell*)
- `?` = exactly 1 letter (e.g., `H?nser` → *Hanser, Hauser, Henser*)

LEADING WILDCARDS & SURNAMES WITH SPACES

- **Leading Wildcards:** You CAN place wildcards at the beginning of names! `*smith` finds *Naismith*, *Goldsmith*, or *Smith*.
- **Surnames with Spaces:** Ancestry treats spaces as word breaks. Searching `De La *ruz` fails because `*ruz` has only 3 letters!
- **Fix 1 (Remove Space):** Combine into one term: `DeLa*ruz` or `Van*yck`.
- **Fix 2 (Leading Wildcard Prefix):** Wildcard the prefix completely: `*Cruz`, `*Dyck`, or `*Buren`!

WILDCARD SEARCH CONSTRAINTS

- **3-Letter Minimum:** Search terms must contain at least 3 letters total alongside wildcards (e.g., `*ack` or `Smit*` work; `*ck` or `Sm*` fail).

4. FREE HYBRID WORKFLOW

1. Build & organize your tree on a **Free Guest Account** at home.
2. Visit the library to access **Ancestry Library Edition** for free records.
3. Email or USB transfer files, then upload & attach them to your free tree!