

Some sample messages for communicating with DNA matches

© compiled by Gail Burk - - June 7, 2022

in all messages

- * use a header, such as “Re: 4th to 6th cousin DNA match”
- * keep message brief on initial contact; say thank you at the end of your message
- * add a personal touch, if relevant (e.g., you’ve met someone in your match’s family)
- * sign your first and last name, especially if your database sobriquet is an alias

as ongoing correspondence develops with a recipient, consider exchanging e-mail addresses, so that photos and documents can be shared; I use the phrase, “If you are comfortable sending me your e-mail address, I can send copies of photos and documents to you by way of e-mail attachments.” If the person sends their e-mail address, I then provide my e-mail address to them when I acknowledge receipt of their information.

messaging DNA matches with public trees

- * reference information in the recipient’s tree, where relevant
- * ask a brief question or two, where appropriate
- * invite the person to view your public tree

message examples

Example one - - Hello Brandon: Ancestry DNA shows that you and I are close genetic matches. Since your DNA profile lists you as Brandon Arthur, I’m assuming we match by way of our shared Arthur line.

On your tree, you show an Austin Arthur, born 1929, who died at Albuquerque. Do you know who your Austin Arthur’s father was? I believe your Austin may be the person I show in my public BARRETT tree on Ancestry as Austin Conley ARTHUR, born 1 March 1929, at Bristol, Virginia, and who died 29 October 2004, at Albuquerque. I hope to determine how we overlap. I look forward to hearing from you and sharing information. Very truly yours, Gail Burk

Brandon’s response [two years later] - - Who is this? I see pictures of my family. Art and Jackie were my grandparents.

Gail’s reply to Brandon - - Hello Brandon: Thank you for your message. I descend from Helen Gladys Arthur, daughter of William Arthur (1860-1943) and

Velma Waterbury (1854-1930). Gladys Arthur was my grandmother. She was the younger sister of your ancestor, William Leslie “Busty” Arthur (1891-1972).
[Followed by additional information showing how Brandon and I descend from common ancestors.] I believe you and I are second cousins, once removed. I’m one generation older than you, so your father would be my second cousin.
[Followed by some additional details about our mutual ancestors.]

Since Brandon seemed upset about the photos, I addressed that concern by writing: many of the photos I’ve attached to people in my tree at Ancestry are photos from my family. Other photos are images I have found that are publicly available at Ancestry. If you have questions about our common ancestors as shown in my tree, please ask, and I will do my best to answer! Yours truly, Gail

Example two - - Hello Patrick: I see that you and I are a 4th to 6th cousin DNA match at Ancestry. Working back from the Walter Leo Bird you show on your linked tree, I’ve looked at several previous generations of Bird family members, without finding anyone who looks familiar. I see that there’s a marriage record for Walter Leo Bird and Patricia Ann George. I’m beginning to think that my DNA connection to you might be through Patricia A. George’s family. Could you share with me the names of Patricia George’s parents so I could evaluate the DNA connection there? I look forward to hearing back from you, and I look forward to exchanging information with you, once we find out where our DNA connection lies. Yours truly, Gail Burk

[no response yet!]

messaging DNA matches with private trees

- * think about using an opening sentence that will intrigue the recipient, such as “I hope you can help me to solve a family mystery,” or “I hope your tree can help me to determine the parent of my father . . .” Of course, this phrasing can also be used when messaging matches with public trees
- * perhaps reference the surname(s) you are hoping to find, but keep it brief!
- * play the sympathy card!

Example one - - Dear tomr: Ancestry shows that you and I are a 5th to 8th cousin match, and that you have the surname WATERBURY in your tree. I am writing to request access to your private tree in order to evaluate the Waterbury match. Thank you, Gail Burk

tomr's response - - he extended the invitation to view his private tree, of which I was notified by Ancestry. He also sent a brief Ancestry message - - Hi: Eliza Ann Waterbury. Tom

Gail's reply to tomr - - Dear Tom: Thank you very much for extending an invitation to view the Waterbury line of your tree. I believe we are connected, and I hope that, between us, we can determine how. Gail

This turned out to be a very useful DNA match, as his tree put me on the track of three siblings of my second GGF, and ultimately helped me to break through my Waterbury brick wall. In a subsequent message I shared detailed information with tomr about how he and I match - - and thanked him again for sharing his tree.

Example two - - Hello KB: I hope your tree can help our family solve a DNA mystery. I and three of my paternal first cousins have taken the Ancestry DNA test. Our results confirm that you are a close DNA match in our paternal line. We are all grandchildren of Frank H. Barrett (born 1893, at Somerville, Massachusetts). My cousins and I, however, do not share any Barrett matches at any DNA testing company. After detailed analysis and consultation with a forensic genealogist, I have concluded that our grandfather was the son of Lalia Siteman (born 1869, at Ship Harbour, Nova Scotia) and an unknown man. We believe that our DNA match with you links us to the unknown biological father of our grandfather, Frank Barrett.

I note that your Ancestry profile indicates that you have a private tree. I am writing to request an invitation to view your private tree, in order to learn clues that might help us find our grandfather's biological parent. Thank you in advance for whatever information you can provide. Very truly yours, Gail Burk

KB's response - - I do not see where we could be related, but I opened my tree.

Gail's reply to KB - - Hello KB: Thank you for your message and for providing access to your tree. I am not sure yet how we connect, but I and my other three cousins all show a paternal DNA match to you that cannot be explained any other way than as a link to our grandfather's unknown paternal ancestry. All of us are most anxious to solve the mystery of our grandfather's biological parentage on his father's line. I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to view your tree. Thank you. Gail

Gail's later follow-up message to KB - - Hello KB: I am writing to update you on my progress, and to say again how much I appreciate your sharing your tree information. It appears that we may match by way of the MOLL line, as my

cousins and I have matches to MOLL through other shared matches; and some of these shared matches also match to you. Are you aware of any geographic connection to the brothers or cousins of your Emaline MOLL who might have been in Massachusetts around 1892? Thank you again, Gail

Note: When you gain access to someone's private tree, take screenshots, or print off their tree right away, in case they later decide to rescind the invitation to view the tree.

messaging DNA matches with no trees

- * consider attaching an 8-name list of surnames, or a 16-name list of surnames. I keep lists of 8 surnames and 16 surnames which I can easily copy and paste into messages.

Example one - - Hello Garin: Ancestry DNA shows that you and I are a 4th to 6th cousin genetic match, with a "high" degree of confidence. I'm interested in determining how we overlap. Below are the surnames I am researching, out to four generations. Are you connected to any of these families? I look forward to hearing from you and sharing information. Thank you. Gail Burk

Garin's response - - I am connected to Arthur on my mother side. I am grandson to Art Arthur; he had 4 children. David, Leslie, Tracy(my mother) and Jimbo

Gail's reply to Garin - - Hello Garin: Thank you for your response. Although we both have Arthur ancestors, I am not sure who your Art Arthur is. Do you know who was the father or grandfather of Art Arthur? Gail

Note: We have since had additional correspondence about our mutual Arthur family, and I have been able to place Garin's mother and grandfather into the proper place in my tree.

responding to people who initiate contact with you

- * always thank them for their message
- * when information is vague or confusing, ask questions in your response
- * if information is obviously incorrect, make corrective suggestions gently

Example one - - message from Wayne - - My maternal grandmother was Merna Alice McLavy. According to Ancestry DNA we are 4th or 6th cousins but I have no clue what

the connection is. Your postings keep showing up on hints for the McLavy Family so you have obviously done a lot of research on the family and must have a connection. (you've found some interesting things that I haven't located so I have found your contributions very helpful, and at times intriguing). I can't find the connection in your tree so please fill in the blanks. I would be happy to share my tree info with you. Wayne

Gail's response to Wayne - - Hello Wayne: Thank you for your message. Here's how I think we are related. Our most recent common ancestors were Jacob S. Miller (1837-1912) and his wife, Anna Gilson (1846-1919). They were my second great-grandparents, and if I have charted things correctly, they were also your second great-grandparents. I believe you and I are third cousins to each other, which is a little closer match than Ancestry DNA shows. I feel confident in drawing this conclusion because you and I both share DNA matches with other people who I have definitely identified as descendants of Jacob Miller & Anna Gilson.

If I have worked things out correctly, you descend from Jacob Miller & Anna Gilson by way of their daughter, Mary Alma Miller (1877-1951), who married Benjamin McLavy (1869-1915). [followed by several generations of information] Merna & Haviland Collins' children included Delores Collins (1924-2012), who married Earl Anthony Monez (1916-2001). Are Delores & Earl Monez your parents? [followed by a paragraph of information about how I descend from Jacob Miller and Anna Gilson, including the names of my parents, Harvey and Ernestine] You can see all this information on my public BARRETT family tree at Ancestry.

I would welcome an invitation to view your tree, as I lack some information about the McLavy branch of the family. I did meet Ed and Irma McLavy, and Alonzo "Lon" McLavy when I was young. I'm not sure if I ever met your grandmother, Merna. The McLavys were among my mother's favorite relatives. Yours truly,
Gail Burk

Wayne's reply to Gail - - Hello Gail, Thank you so much for your reply. Yes, you do have the lineage correct. When I was young we traveled often down to Long Beach to see my grandparents. Merna was close with Ed and Irma and that continued after Uncle Ed's passing. My mother and Irma's daughter Norma (obviously first cousins) were close and stayed in touch through the years. The last time I saw Irma and Norma was at my wedding. The names of Harvey and Ernestine ring a bell, I must have heard it mentioned by either my mother or grandmother. I will send you an invitation for my tree. [followed by some additional family information].

Note: This contact has developed into mutually beneficial ongoing genealogical correspondence.

Example two - - message from Margaret - - Good Evening! I hope you are well. I am not nearly familiar enough with this site to fully understand what I am doing, however I am interested in trying to find relatives of Buenta Green and I believe she is linked to a family tree of yours. Are you a direct relative? Thanks so much for your time!

Gail's response to Margaret - - Hello Margaret: Thank you for your message. I see that you and I are not a DNA match to each other. Do you manage the DNA account for someone else? If so, whose DNA results should I be looking for? I maintain a number of trees at Ancestry, and manage several DNA accounts besides my own.

I regret that I don't recognize either of the two names you have in your brief Carter Family Tree. I also don't recognize the name Buenta Green. I'll need more information from you in order to determine if, or how, I have any information about your Buenta Green. Which of my trees leads you to suspect a connection to your Buenta Green? Yours truly, Gail

Margaret's reply - - Hi Gail, thanks for responding back so quickly! From what I can tell when I search for Buenta Mable Green on Ancestry she appears to be connected through the Barrett Family tree and that's how I ended up with your contact. My mother was adopted in 1945 and the only information she has is the name "Buenta M Green". So we've taken to Ancestry to try to fill in the blanks! Thank you again for your quick response. I still have a lot of learning to familiarize myself with the site.

Gail's further reply to Margaret - - Hi Margaret: After receiving your reply, I poked around on my public Barrett tree at Ancestry, and found Buenta Green, as wife of Leon Edward Croenne, Jr. (1926-1984). I apologize that I didn't recognize Buenta's name from your initial e-mail. I have added a lot of names to my tree lately, as I trace the descendants of siblings of my direct ancestors in an attempt to determine how various DNA matches connect to my family.

Here's the connection from my tree to Buenta: [followed by a detailed paragraph spelling out the connection, plus references to sources for Margaret to check out on her own. I also listed several other public trees that included Margaret's person]. Since my Barrett Family Tree at Ancestry is a public tree, you can see these generations there [followed with a step-by-step description of how to get to Buenta in my tree.

You mention that your mother was adopted in 1945. Was Buenta Green your mother? Or was your mother a child of Buenta Green? Buenta Green was born in 1928, so she would have been a teenager in 1945. Did Buenta possibly have a child in 1945? I wish you good luck on your search.

[no further reply from Margaret]

responding to someone for whom you have no information

Example three - - message from Deanna - - Humphrey Hall Turton was my husband 's grandfather. He left his first wife when Arthur was a toddler. Do you have any photos of him in later life? I only have one of him and Faye--- it might be a wedding photo if they had a civil ceremony. Thank you. Deanna

Gail's response to Deanna - - Thank you for your Ancestry message. I am sorry to say that I do not have any information about, or photos of, your husband's grandfather, Humphrey Hall Turton. I will retain your message, and if I find information in the future, I will be in contact. I wish you good luck on your search & research. Yours truly, Gail Burk

advice from others

Diahan Southard - - Contacting Your DNA Matches - - It's like a first date.
<https://www.yourdnaguide.com/ydgblog/contacting-your-dna-matches>

Ancesry - - Contacting DNA Matches: Get More Responses with these Pro Tips - -
<https://www.ancestry.com/corporate/blog/contacting-dna-matches-get-more-responses-with-these-pro-tips/>

Patricia Hartley - - Ready to Contact Your DNA Matches? Here's what to say (and not to say) - - <https://familyhistorydaily.com/genealogy-help-and-how-to/contacting-dna-match/>

Ancestral Findings - - How to Communicate with Your DNA Matches the Proper Way - -
<https://ancestralfindings.com/how-to-communicate-with-your-dna-matches-the-proper-way/>

some additional considerations

- * always respond to someone who contacts you, even if you cannot answer their question. It's courteous genealogical manners.
- * If the contact turns out to be a fruitful one, consider copying and saving copies of the back-and-forth correspondence in a word document.
- * If you have an important DNA match who never responds and does not have a tree, consider doing some detective work to determine who the person is, and build a private, non-searchable, "mirror tree" to figure out who their ancestors are. We will devote a future DNA SIG session to this subject.