

Adding Notes to your Ancestry DNA Matches

It is very easy to overload your brain whilst getting to grips with DNA research. There is so much to learn – trees, centiMorgans, half third cousins twice removed... Trying to carry everything you need to know in your memory can only work for so long! Having somewhere reliable to record comments and ideas, no matter how cryptic they are, is worth the effort involved in setting up a system and bothering to write things down. Apart from anything else, it can stop you going over and over the same thought processes or researching the same ideas repeatedly.



Helpfully, Ancestry includes a “notes” area for each of your matches, allowing you to add a limited amount of text. I have found that combining the **Notes field** with the use of the **MedBetterDNA Chrome extension** and **Text emojis** (eg, 🟡 🌸 🍀) has made searching so much easier – it enables me to review a whole screen of matches very easily and identify patterns/similarities between them all at a glance.

Text Notes – What should I include?

I aim to keep the text in the notes area brief. Ideally it should cover the essential information in just three lines, so it can all be displayed without needing to expand the notes box (there are illustrations that show the limits of how much text can be added on the following pages).

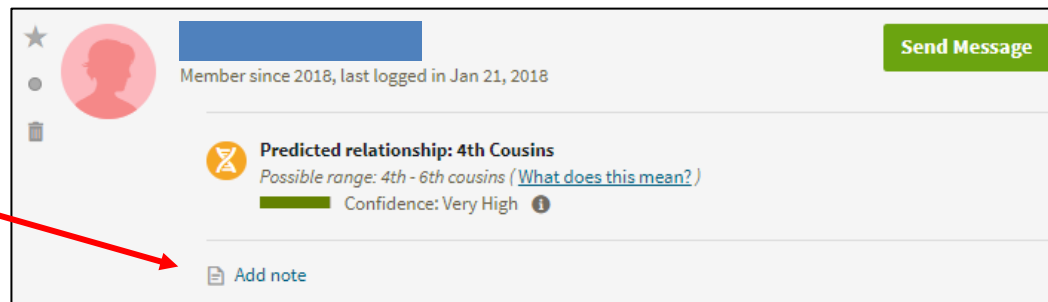
The facts I record will vary depending upon the search – there is no perfect one-size-fits-all solution. This list covers the areas I would normally consider commenting upon:

- **When did this match appear** – month/year?
- **How much DNA do we share** – add the number of centiMorgans?
- **What is the connection between the match and the person who tested?** If Ancestry has generated a Shared Ancestor Hint I record information about this – Ancestry has had a few problems where information like this has disappeared for a while! Alternatively, I might add some possibilities from a relationship predictor chart or website, such as the [Shared cM Project](#), eg, “Half 2C / 2C1R / Half 1C2R / 1C3R”.
- **Has the match got a tree?** If you find an unlinked tree it is worth making a comment about it in the notes area – you can spend hours going in and out of different screens for the same match to see if there is a tree waiting to be discovered! I also sometimes add a comment about the usefulness of their tree (not to be judgemental... but revisiting a tree that you looked at earlier in the day that consisted of three people, all marked as private, gets frustrating after a while)!
- Are any of the **surnames** or **locations** in their tree that are of interest in some way?
- **Do they fall into an identifiable cluster of matches?** *This will vary from one search to another, but is the match maternal or paternal? Do they belong to known branch of your tree “maternal grandfather’s ancestors”, or part of a cluster that have connections to a particular country/area?*

The instructions below will show you how to add notes, offer you some ideas about how you can use symbols/pictures within notes to work more effectively, and illustrate the differences between viewing your match list with and without the MedBetterDNA extension.

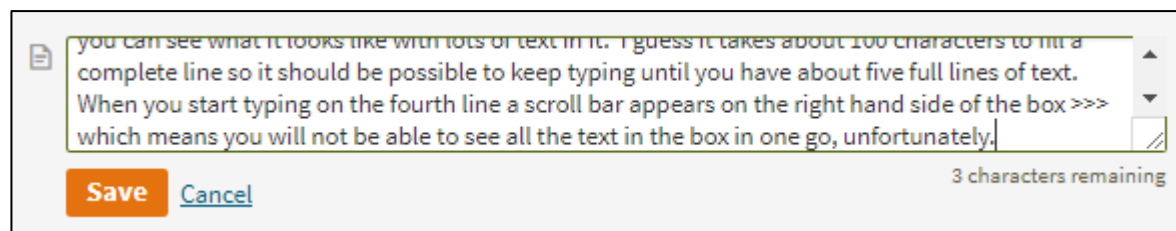
How do I add Text Notes?

- 1 When you are viewing a match there is a space to enter notes – just click **Add note** and start typing:

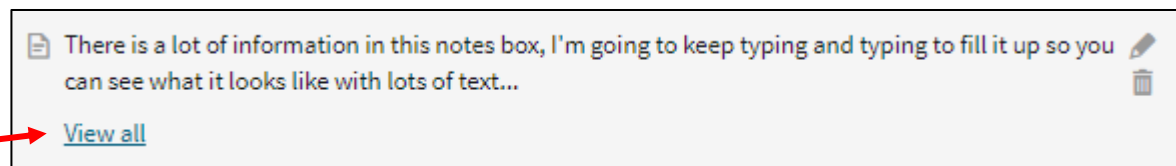


- 2 Although you can enter up to 500 characters, only a limited amount of text will be displayed in the notes area as you type. Once you have added more than four lines a **scroll bar** appears on the right-hand side of the notes section:

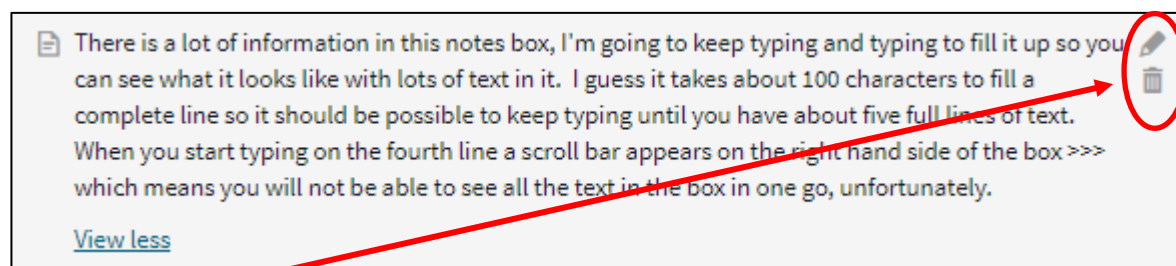
Click the **Save** button when you have finished adding text:



- 3 If you write a very long note and save it, the text displayed on screen will be limited to the first couple of lines:

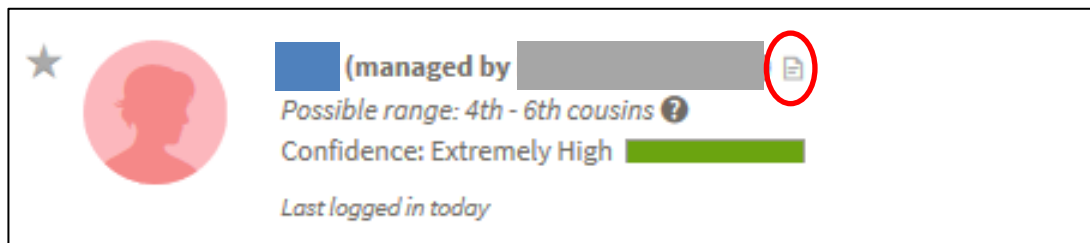


Clicking the **View all** option will display the full note – but having to constantly click options is a bit irritating, so keeping entries brief can be helpful.



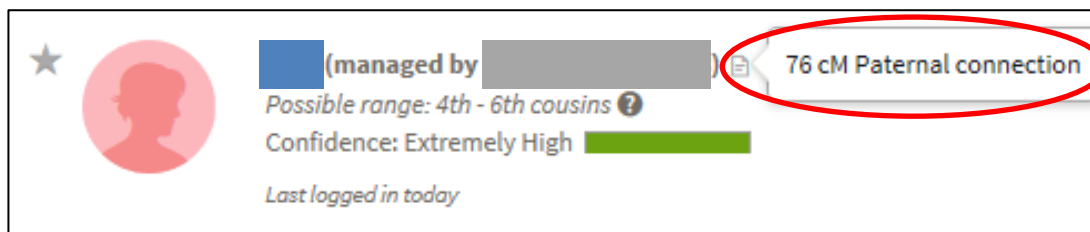
You can **Edit** your note by clicking on the pencil symbol on the right of the note (or **Delete** it entirely by clicking the Dustbin/Trash Can symbol).

- 4 Although it is easy enough to read the notes when you view an individual match's profile, when you look at your full list of matches all you see is an icon to let you know that some notes have been added:



If you hover your mouse over the note icon you will get a pop-up box enabling you to read the text - but continually having to click icons is a bit tedious.

This is where the magic of the MedBetterDNA extension comes in!

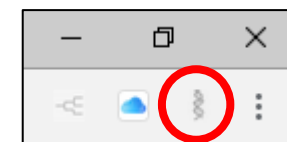


MedBetterDNA Chrome Extension

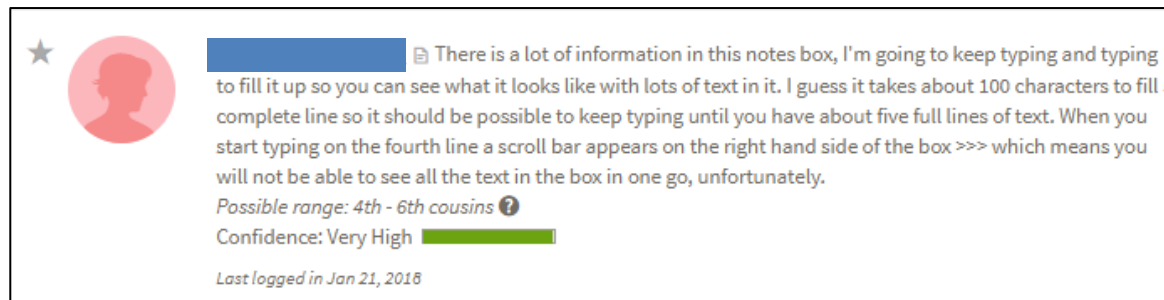
You need to be using the Chrome browser to add this extension. You can find more information about what this extension has to offer and how to install it by visiting the Chrome Web Store and searching for MedBetterDNA.

Once installed there are several ways in which MedBetterDNA can help you work with your match list. To be able to view notes when you look at your Ancestry DNA match list, all you have need to do is:

- Click the **MedBetterDNA icon** in the top right-hand corner of your screen
- Click **Options**
- Make sure there is a tick in the "**always show Notes**" option
- Click the **Save** button.

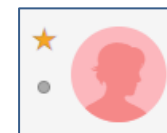


Here is an example of how the notes would be displayed once MedBetterDNA's "always show notes" option is turned on – far easier to work with than the examples at the top of this page 😊



Text emoji symbols

Ancestry provides a very basic way of marking matches – the favourite/star option. I have heard people “wish” for different coloured stars on many occasions, but sadly no additional filtering/annotating tools have been made available yet.



They say a picture is worth a thousand words... Although you can't add images to the notes field, you can add text emojis, which give a range of coloured symbols. To add text emojis you have a couple of options:

- ✓ Go to a website that offers a range of text emojis, (such as <http://getemoji.com/>), copy a single symbol and then paste it into the text of your note.
- ✓ If you are using a Windows computer you can use a keyboard shortcut – make sure your cursor is in the right place in your note, then:
 - Hold down the Windows key on your keyboard and (at the same time) the semi-colon key
 - Click the emoji you want to add
 - Close the pop-up window.

You may find it useful to create a text document to collect together all the emojis you want to use, or even to add them all to the notes on your first match so they are easily to hand for further copying/pasting. I discovered that some emojis look great on the original list but are not so clear when you have added them to the notes field – it is worth experimenting with adding a selection, saving the note and then viewing the match list to see how well they display. Being proficient at copy/paste makes adding an entry such as “🌸 MATERNAL” to a few hundred matches far easier and quicker!

You can use the symbols however it suits you; perhaps something pink for the maternal side of your tree/blue for paternal, or different symbols for different branches of your tree (eg, ❤️ = Granny Matilda's ancestors). If you are searching for both your biological parents and cannot yet identify maternal/paternal you can use the symbols to start marking all the matches who form clusters of shared matches. Hopefully you can then work on each cluster in turn to see if you can find the common theme amongst them.

To give you some ideas, here are some examples of the emojis and descriptions I have used:

🟦 PATERNAL 🌸 MATERNAL

For different clusters of matches I found that it was easiest to stick to simple shapes and colours, eg: ❤️ 🟡 🟢 🟣 🖤 🔴 🔵

I really liked the people emojis, eg: 👤 🧑 🧔 🧑 🧑 🧑 but was disappointed to find that they were just too small to work well for me!

I have also used emoji symbols in other ways – for example a tree symbol 🌲 in the notes indicates that I have added the match and their ancestors to my tree and have attempted to find a common ancestor between us. Again, anything that stops you repeating the same task more than once is worthwhile!

The End Result

The screenshots below give you some idea of how your view of Ancestry's match list can improve with a few added emojis and the MedBetterDNA extension.

Ancestry DNA Match List – without the MedBetterDNA Extension

★ [Redacted]
Possible range: 1st - 2nd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in Dec 27, 2017

★ [Redacted]
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in Aug 29, 2017

★ [Redacted] (managed by [Redacted])
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in 6 days ago

★ [Redacted]
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in Feb 26, 2018

★ [Redacted] (managed by [Redacted])
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in today

Ancestry DNA Match List – with the MedBetterDNA Extension

★ [Redacted] 507 cM - First Cousin once removed [SMITH] and [JONES] ' Great-Granddaughter of [Redacted]
Possible range: 1st - 2nd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in Dec 27, 2017

★ [Redacted] 242 cM [BROWN] Unlinked tree
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in Aug 29, 2017

★ [Redacted] (managed by [Redacted]) 235 cM - [SMITH]
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in 6 days ago

★ [Redacted] 234 cM - [SMITH]
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in Feb 26, 2018

★ [Redacted] (managed by [Redacted]) 211 cM - [JONES] SAH = Great-Grandfather (via different wives) [Redacted]
Possible range: 2nd - 3rd cousins
Confidence: Extremely High
Last logged in today

For further help discovering your DNA family, [visit DNADiscoveries.co.uk](http://DNADiscoveries.co.uk)



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