

DeadEnds Date Formats

Dates are used throughout genealogical data to indicate when events occurred. It would be nice if dates could always be specified to an exact day, month, and year, but this is not always possible. Sometimes dates can only be estimated or placed within a range. Sometimes a date can be bounded by the dates of other events (e.g., a person dies before their will is probated).

The DeadEnds programs support a style for representing dates that cover a variety of different situations.

Single Dates

Most events occur on a single day so their dates should be expressed as a single date. Sometimes that date is known completely, known partially, estimated, questionable or bounded.

Completely Known Dates

Dates can be fully expressed in exact format in the following ways...

17 January 1953

January 17, 1953

1/17/1953

Months do not have to be spelled out completely letter case is not important. Any common abbreviation can be used or any pattern of letters that uniquely identify the month. Though allowed, dates should not be recorded using the 1/17/1953 format because of the ambiguity that can occur when different ordering schemes for the numbers occur.

Partially Known Dates

Often dates are known only to the month or year. They are expressed by leaving out either the day or the day and the month. For example:

January 1953

1953

There is no slash-based format for partially known dates.

Estimated Dates

Genealogical dates are sometimes approximate, often based on estimates or rules of thumb. Estimated dates are expressed using the words “about” or “estimated” or the abbreviations “abt” or “est” as a prefix to a known date. For example:

about January 17, 1953

estimated January 1953

abt 1953

est 1/17/1953

Questionable Dates

Questionable dates are similar to approximate dates except there is far less assurance in the mind of the researcher about the accuracy of the date. Questionable dates are formed by adding the prefix “possibly” or “probably” to a known date. Abbreviations “poss” and “prob” can also be used. For example:

possibly January 17, 1953

prob February 1954

Upper and Lower Bound Dates

Unknown dates can sometimes be bounded by known dates. Bounded dates are formed by adding the word “before” or “after” (or abbreviations “bef” or “aft”) to any known date. For example:

before January 1, 1953

aft January 1953

Bounded dates can also preceded by “on or” or “in or”. Examples:

on or before January 1, 1953

in or aft January 1954

Computed or Interpreted Dates

Dates are sometimes computed by formulas or interpreted from tables. The DeadEnds date format includes “computed” and “interpreted” for these cases. Abbreviations “cmp” and “int” are available. For example:

computed March 1949

interpreted March 25, 1951

Multiple Dates

Multiple dates are formed by combining one or more known dates into patterns. The known dates can be in any of the formats described in the Single Dates section.

Event Occurred on Multiple Dates

If an event occurred on multiple dates, the date should be expressed as any number of DeadEnds single dates separated by the word “and.” For example...

March 4, 1876 and March 7, 1877

Event Occurred on One of a Number of Possible Dates

If an event occurred on one day from a number of possible dates the date is expressed as any number of DeadEnds single dates separated by the word “or.” For example...

March 4, 1876 or March 7, 1877

Date Ranges

Date ranges use two known dates to express a range of dates. There are two types of ranges, those indicating that an event occurred somewhere within the range, and those indicating that the event occurred throughout the range. The two known dates can be in any of the formats described in the Single Dates section.

Event Occurred between Two Dates

Sometimes the date of an event can be bounded within a range. For example you may have a woman in your database, and the last known date you know she was living was the date of her last child’s birth, and you also have found a date when her husband was described as a widower on a census. You can then assume she died some time between those two dates. Date ranges of this type are expressed as two single dates and adding the words “between” and “and.” For example...

between March 4, 1876 and March 7, 1877

Event Occurred Over a Range of Dates

Sometimes dates occur over a known range of dates, for example, a ship transit event that brought an immigrant to a new country. Date ranges of this type are expressed as two single dates by adding the words “from” and “to.” For example...

from March 4, 1876 to March 7, 1877

Combinations of Single Dates and Date Ranges

DeadEnds allows sequences of single dates and date ranges, separated by either “or” or “and.” It is not anticipated that this complexity will be needed often.

Special Cases

Double Year Dates

In the Julian calendar the year began on March 25, reflecting the importance of the vernal equinox in pagan cultures. Because of this, dates between January 1 and March 24 from the Julian calendar often show two years, the year that would be used if the year began on January 1, and the actual Julian year. Pope Gregory issued a Papal bull on 24 February 1582 ordering the Roman Catholic church to convert to a new calendar (the Gregorian calendar we use today). Different secular authorities shifted from the Julian to Gregorian calendars at different times. Because the calendar was the result of a Papal bull, authorities in Catholic-based states converted rapidly. Protestant-based authorities were far less willing to convert, and

full adoption required almost two centuries. Britain and the American colonies adopted the calendar in September 1752, when Wednesday, September 2, was followed by Thursday, September 14.

To remove the ambiguity of dates between 1 January and 24 March in Julian years, DeadEnds dates support the year expressed in a conventional double year format:

22 January 1734/5

January 24, 1739/40

February 1699/700

The second year can be shown at any level of detail:

22 January 1734/5

22 January 1734/35

22 January 1734/735

22 January 1734/1735

February 1699/0

February 1699/00

February 1699/700

February 1699/1700

Arbitrary Strings

DeadEnds also allows dates to be expressed as free format strings. Any string that does not conform to the rules for single dates, multiple dates, and date ranges listed above, are treated as free format strings. DeadEnds will attempt to infer at least a year from such free format strings in order to support sorting. DeadEnds will also attempt to infer a month and a day. To avoid any errors and ambiguities however, the supported formats should be used whenever possible. For example:

on a Tuesday in the spring of 1873

will sort properly with dates from the year 1873.