

# How to use a custom reference numbers system

## Introduction

Before the introduction of computers, all family history information was stored on paper and card, which was more often hand written and a reference numbering system could have been used, to help control all the people that might have the same name. With the introduction of computers and family history programs, this meant each person could have they own reference number. In most cases the old paper system is quite often no longer used as the computer is used more often and in turn a person reference number is created by the computer.

## Computer reference numbers

All family history programs have some sort of automatic reference numbering system, as soon as you start to add people into the program. This number is also used if you export your file out of the program as a GEDCOM<sup>1</sup> file. This automatic number might not be shown, but you would see it if you opened the exported GEDCOM file, so to see this reference number within the program you have to set reference numbering in the program preferences. But in all family history programs you can use your own numbering system. You can see this in the example on the right, taken from a GEDCOM file.

Program generated number

```
0 @I34@ INDI
1 NAME William Thomas George
1 SEX M
1 BIRT
2 DATE 1 JAN 1919
2 PLAC 1 Caton Terrace Le
1 DEAT
2 DATE 28 SEP 2003
2 PLAC Canvey Island
1 RELI|
2 PLAC Church of England
1 REFN WL 014
```

Custom generated number

## Alphanumeric number system

The best way to control all the people in your database is to use an alphanumeric system, which I have found best is to use a group of two letters and three or four numbers. The way it works is to use the first letter of the person forename, and the first letter of the persons surname (CL001). This is very helpful when a father, son and grandson has the same forename, as seen in the table below.

Charles Linge (father)	CL001	William Linge	WL001
Charles Linge (son)	CL002	Unknown Linge	UNL001
Charles Linge (grandson)	CL003	William Unknown	WX002

The controlling letter is always the persons first name (birth name), as you can see from the table above. If you do not have the surname I would still give it a name but put an X for the second letter (WX003). If you know the surname but not the first name, this person would get a temporary alpha numeric number (UNL001). So when you find out the persons first name its alpha numeric number is changed and given a correct alphanumeric number. To keep control of these numbers that have been used, and this can be recorded in a spreadsheet.

---

<sup>1</sup> Genealogical Data Communication developed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church)

# How to use a custom reference numbers system

## Name Index spreadsheet cell headings

In the next two screen shots you will see the cell heading that can be used, this list was taken from the original cardx I got when I first started my family history. When using them in a spreadsheet, you can use any heading you want.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Ref#	FirstNan	MidName	urn	YrBoi	PlaceOfBirth	Cn	YrM	
726	WL 001	William		Linge	M	1841	Elveden	SFK	
727	WL 002	William		Linge	M	1837	Knettishall	SFK	1856
728	WL 003	William	J	Linge	M	1856		SFK	1878

J	K	L	M	N	O
PlaceMarr	YrDi	PlaceDied	Fath	Moth	Spous
			WL 021	SS 1025	SX 1003
Brighton			WL 004	SB 1002	MP 1001

If you find you have put the person in twice, I always pick the lowest number to keep for that person and then bold the number so that is highlighted and ready to be reused at a later date.

	A	B	C	D
1	Ref#	FirstNan	MidName	urn
181	DL 037	Doris	M	Linge
182	<b>DL 038</b>			<b>Linge</b>
183	DL 039	Daniel	J	Linge

Using this format you are able to keep track on everybody in your database, so you can check the information in this database, against your family tree program, you are also able to use the ref no's on all your other indexes I.E.

Census, Parish registers, GRO indexes etc.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Cardx	Forname	Surna	Ag	Yr	S	R Head	Ma	Address	Census Place
			me		Boi					
	WL 004	William	Linge	74	1807	M	Head	M	Road Side	Knettishall
125	WL 011	William	Linge	73	1808	M	Paup I+	U	Maldon Work Ho +	Maldon All Sts
126										

Census index

## Conclusion

At the end of the day we all have our own way of doing of storing data, when it come to our family history, but over time I have found this format very useful, to give each person their own ref no, has paid off many times when I have had to check for mistakes which can come up quite often. But I hope this has given you an insight into a way of keeping track of all your people with the same name.

Any question or thoughts please email me [kevin.cole@genfamilytree.co.uk](mailto:kevin.cole@genfamilytree.co.uk)

Copy of this file can be found at <https://genfamilytree.co.uk/fh-spreadsheets/>