

# Surname Website

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Note – For a complete explanation of how to design and build genealogy websites, see the book “Getting Started on Your Genealogy Website” available from the [www.genealogyhosting.com](http://www.genealogyhosting.com) website.

**W**e have created three sample genealogy websites at [www.genealogyhosting.com](http://www.genealogyhosting.com) which can be used as examples or as idea generators. These are working genealogy websites which we have created in the course of our own personal genealogy work. There is an article describing each of them available on the [www.genealogyhosting.com](http://www.genealogyhosting.com) website. The three sample websites are:

- Elusive Ancestor Website: [www.poill27.info](http://www.poill27.info)
- Genealogy Workbench: [www.martygale.name](http://www.martygale.name)
- Surname website (the subject of this article): [www.mannigel.org](http://www.mannigel.org)

## A Surname Website: [www.mannigel.org](http://www.mannigel.org)

Our example of a surname website is [www.mannigel.org](http://www.mannigel.org). This website focuses on the surname of Mannigel. The purpose of the surname website is to collect and record all the ancestors with a given surname. Also, the surname website must facilitate communication with fellow genealogists especially descendants of the surname. Surname websites are often sponsored by family associations whose members are interested in staying close, advancing the knowledge of the surname, and documenting the genealogy of the ancestors with the surname.

Many surname website have a different structure than proposed below. The structure presented below is different because of its underlying purposes:

- The structure below is for a surname website which will be a tool to support the creation of biographies of ancestors with the Mannigel surname. This is a very typical goal of many genealogists doing surname research – to write a series of biographies of the ancestors. In that case, the surname website is designed as an “information pump” to make it easy to collect, categorize, and store surname citations then consolidate the information into prototype biographies which will serve as the base for finished biographies proper.
- On the other hand, many other surname websites are a final literary work which tell the story of ancestors with that surname. This type of surname website uses the hypermedia capabilities of website technology to create a dynamic document to efficiently present all known information including their genealogy, historical documents, photos, and stories.

## The Basic Problem of the Surname Project

So, it is our intention to collect enough information through the years to write meaningful biographies of all our Mannigel ancestors. However, the basic problem with any surname research is that often ancestors with the same (or similar) surname and the same (or similar) given name are encountered that are difficult to tell apart. For example, when we first started researching the target surname "Mannigel," we encountered numerous spellings of the surname (e.g., "Mannigel," "Mannigal," "Manigel," "Marnigal," or "Monigle") and numerous references to the same or similar given name (e.g., "William Mannigel" or "Wilhelm Mannigel"). One reason a given name recurs like this is because of the naming patterns of the country (in this case, Germany). The point is that in the early stages of the research as we were collecting Mannigels, it was difficult to distinguish fathers from sons, uncles from nephews, one possible line of the surname from another line of the surname.

We quickly realized that in our research we had to separate the act of collecting information from the act of writing the biographies. So we adapted the terminology of "citations" versus "biographies." Thus, in the above example of "William/Wilhelm Mannigel," the various "Williams" or "Wilhelms" we encountered were recorded on a generic "William Mannigel" citation web page with the facts known as a sort of running log. There is a citation web page for each generic given surname.

The generic given name that we used is the Americanized version where applicable (i.e., "William" instead of "Wilhelm" in this case). Notice that the generic given name is a convention for categorizing the citations and keeping the information together in one place and not an assertion about the surname of a particular ancestor. Sometimes assigning an ancestor to a generic surname citation web page is not perfect such as the case of "John Frederick William Mannigal." Is he a "Frederick Mannigel" or a "William Mannigel?"

The point is that in the early stages of the research, as we encountered all these "Williams," we couldn't make a meaningful distinction between them – they could be the same or different people. So we just dutifully collected the various Mannigel, Mannigals, Monigles, Marnigals, etc. we encountered, recording the information and the sources of the information on generic given name citation web pages as best we could.

Then later as the research progressed, enough information actually emerged to distinguish between the various "Williams" and to determine their relationships if any. At that point, we could start rearranging and synthesizing the information into individual biographies (e.g., "William Mannigel, 1847-1825," "Wilhelm (William) Mannigel, 1859 – 1890")

## Design Principles of the Mannigel Surname Website

Not only is the "citations" versus "biographies" process an effective project management technique for collecting surname information, we found it to also be a natural way to organize our *www.mannigel.org* website. Thus, as the work progressed (and progresses since it is still going on), we started a new citation web page whenever we encountered a seemingly different given name. Later, we did some reorganizing and recategorizing of the ancestors in the citations web pages as we gained insight, although as we pointed out above, the correct categorization of Mannigel ancestor into

the correct generic surname citation web page is not critical. At the early stage of surname research, the genealogist is collecting and not synthesizing. Then as the research progresses and more and more information emerges for a specific ancestor, then biography web pages can be written based on the synthesis of the information of the citation page(s).

Another important design decision of *www.mannigel.org* was to realize that it is an unending project that will perhaps never be completed. However, we considered it important to start communicating with our fellow Mannigel genealogists early. In short, we realized that we had to have a way to have meaningful communication about a moving target, a work-in-progress. By organizing our Mannigel surname website around citations and biographies, this structure facilitated going online early so that fellow genealogists could start collaborating on the project. We found we could put the numerous citation web pages on the website as fast as we collected them. The only requirement was factual recording of information and sources. We weren't concerned at that point about how it looked (and still aren't). Then our fellow genealogists could go to work on these citation web pages right away on their own.

Another important design decision was to realize that the biography web pages don't have to look good or be in final literary form. The biography web page of a particular Mannigel ancestor is just a container to dump the unique information about that ancestor, with an eye on eventually writing and publishing a proper biography. For example, a biography web page will have headings such as "Birth," "Marriages," "Immigration," "Census," "Death," and "Children." When a biography web page is started, these headings will just be handy places to copy and consolidate the ancestor's information from the citation web page. The information will then be synthesized into meaningful life events on the biography web page and text passages will start to be written. At the same time, any images of historical documents will be scanned and put under the respective heading. For example, scans of obituaries will be put under the "Death" heading or scans of census records will be put under the "Census" heading. None of this has to look good and all that is happening is the categorization and synthesis of information but not the final presentation of information.

Then we use the information on the biography web pages to write final, hardcopy biographies of the Mannigel ancestors. For example, each Christmas, we try to pass along some family heritage to our children and their cousins. We create a nice present of a framed-picture of one of our ancestors with a proper biography. We have found that this is a much better way to pass down family heritage rather than the "fire hose" method of deluging them with endless family group sheets.

## Terms Used in Website Design

Most of the features to be implemented in any genealogy website such as a surname website will require, produce, or be associated with information. At *www.genealogyhosting.com*, we have defined methodologies and terms for designing the information structure of a website. These terms will be used to describe the structure of the *www.mannigel.org* website in the remainder of this article. Let's go through them briefly:

Note: We have explained these and many other topics of designing genealogy websites in the book "Getting Started on Your Genealogy Website" available from the [www.genealogyhosting.com](http://www.genealogyhosting.com) website.

## Information Element

The design of any website is concerned with the placement of information on web pages. The packets of information of a topic that are placed on web pages, are given a special name at [www.genealogyhosting.com](http://www.genealogyhosting.com): we call them "information elements." An information element is one or more pieces of information about a specific topic that can be thought of as a whole. For example, a family group sheet, a person on the family group sheet, a list of people buried in a cemetery, a description of the cemetery itself, a plat map of a county, a description of the county itself are all examples of information elements.

Notice that information elements can always be decomposed into lower information elements in some sense. This is because the real world entity which the information element represents can always be decomposed – broken down into its parts. For example, a family group sheet can be decomposed into the individual ancestors because a family consists of people. Structuring the information of a genealogy website comes down to the actual placement of the information elements on specific web pages of the website at a specific level of decomposition.

## Hyperlink Model

In a website, not all the information for a topic is put together in one place on a web page as it is in a typical non-fiction book. Rather, the author can take advantage of the idea of hypermedia – the linking of web pages so readers are not limited to reading the material sequentially and can jump around using hyperlinks based on their needs. With hypermedia, the information elements of a topic are spread over more than one web page. Then the web pages are interlinked via hyperlinks so that visitors can access the information elements in a nonsequential and ad-hoc manner based on their needs.

So how does the author of a website know on which web page a particular information element goes? The placement of information elements is controlled by what we call "the hyperlink model." The hyperlink model consists of all the hyperlinks of the website considered as a logical structure. The hyperlink model controls the presentation and linking of the information elements of the website. The author never adds hyperlinks to the website without first thinking about how the proposed hyperlink would fit into the hyperlink model. The hyperlink model is actually a separate literary work. In other words the hyperlink model is designed and thought of as a single entity by the author.

The hyperlink model is actually implemented by making use of hypermedia in which hyperlinks are placed in the information elements of the web pages of the website. Thus, the hyperlink model is distributed throughout the information elements on the various web pages of a website. However, the author designs the hyperlink model as a single whole even though it is implemented by distributing it in the content throughout the website.

This means the information elements of the web pages of a genealogy website have two duties: first the information elements carry the actual genealogy information of the website and second, the information elements have the hyperlinks of the hyperlink model embedded in them to implement the hyperlink model.

## Multilayered Structure

We have explained multilayered structures as a design approach in much more detail in the article "Using the Multilayered Structure to Design a Genealogy Website" available on the [www.genealogyhosting.com](http://www.genealogyhosting.com) website.

A multilayered structure is a theoretical construct to organize a body of related information. In a multilayered structure, the author places the information elements in logical "layers." The multilayered structure is often used by authors to organize a non-fiction literary work such as a book, a chapter in a book, an article, or in our case, a genealogy website. In fact, the multilayered structure is a perfect way to organize a complex topic such as a genealogy website.

Multilayered structures are created by the author by classifying the information elements which will be used to create the work and placing them in categories. It is always possible to perform this categorization of the information elements because the body of related information in question comes from an underlying discipline (field of study, business, avocation) which has methodologies, theories, and practices. We call it a body of "related" information because the information is coherent, interrelated, and logical. In our case, the author is a genealogist and the discipline is genealogy. Also, whenever a practitioner of the discipline reads a non-fiction literary work which draws on the body of related information and which is organized as a multilayered structure, he or she would quickly understand the categories and would thus instantly understand the organization of the work.

Once the information elements have been classified into categories, then the categories can be manipulated to organize the information. This is done by focusing on the categories just defined. The categories are arranged into layers, stacked like bricks by the author, in which the order of a category in the stack is important. The layers will be carefully arranged by the author so that practitioners of the body of related information can understand it and navigate it (get from one place in the body of related information to another).

The order of the stacking of the categories into proper layers is based on the internal relations between the information elements from one layer to another (not necessarily adjacent). A "relation" is a logical connection between two information elements. The practitioners of the discipline would naturally associate those information elements together.

So how does the author actually create a multilayered structure? The reader is encouraged to read the article "Using the Multilayered Structure to Design a Genealogy Website" available on the [www.genealogyhosting.com](http://www.genealogyhosting.com) website. For now here's a summary (refer to Figure 1) of the work process the author will use to create a multilayered structure:

- The author starts with a body of related information for example specific genealogy information (Figure 1, 1) which will be used to create a non-fiction literary work (e.g., a genealogy website)
- The information elements are classified into categories (Figure 1, 2).
- Then the categories are arranged into layers (Figure 1, 3).
- Once the layers are defined then, the author inserts navigational links between the information elements (Figure 1, 4) which will allow the reader to move efficiently within the literary work.

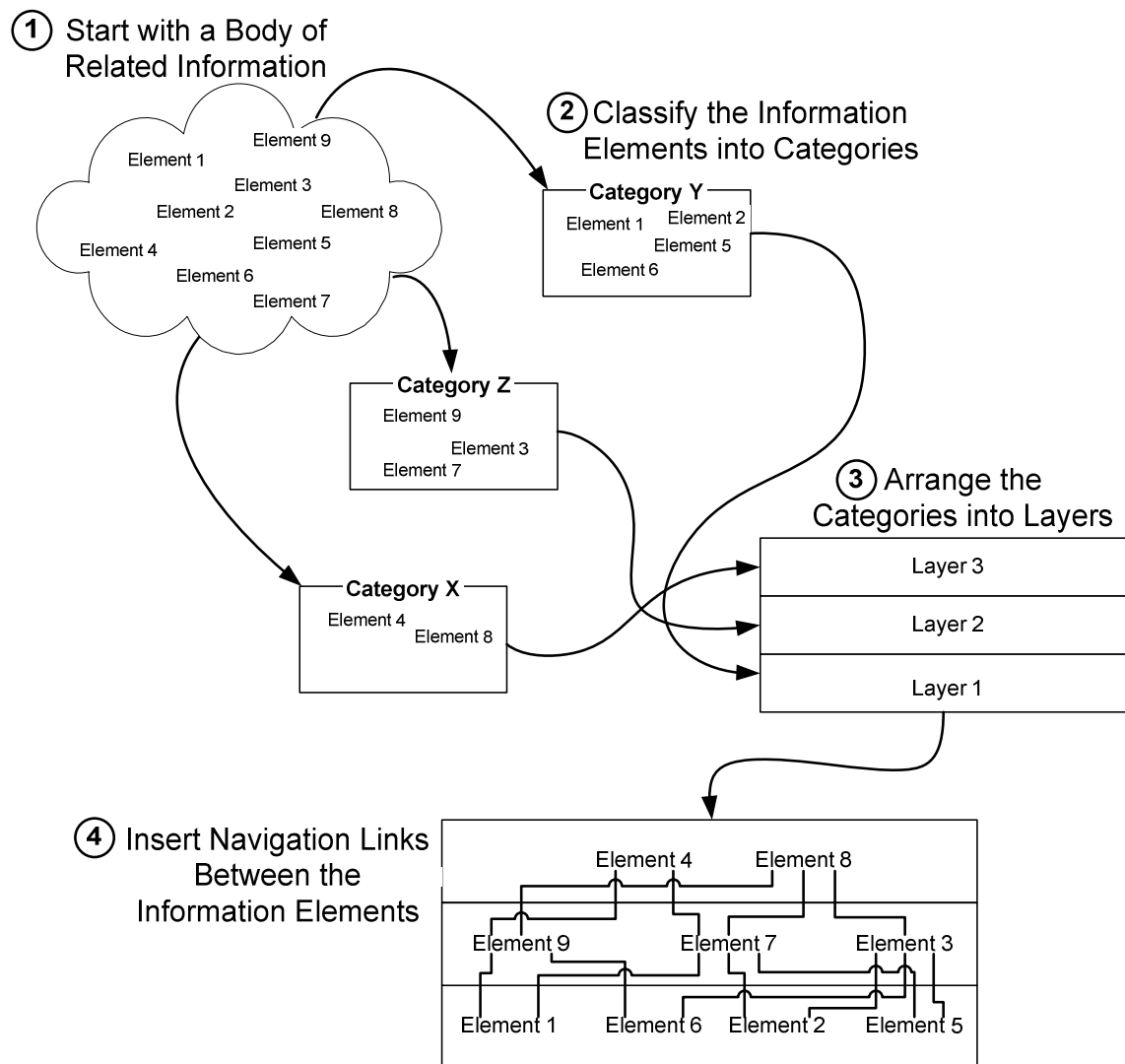


Figure 1 – Creating a Multilayered Structure

## Organization of [www.mannigel.org](http://www.mannigel.org)

Our [www.mannigel.org](http://www.mannigel.org) surname website is organized around a three-layered multilayered structure of 1) general information, 2) biographies, and 3) citations (Figure 2). Let's go through these three layers briefly from the bottom up:

General
Biographies
Citations

Figure 2 - *www.mannigel.org* Multilayered Structure

## Citation Layer

The bottom citations layer contains web pages which are the “atoms” of the information structure of our surname website. That is, they are independent and stand on their own. The citations web pages are organized around generic given names as explained above. Citations are the recording of the details of the source of facts as well as the actual facts about Mannigels in all of its spellings. Citations are generated rapidly as the research progresses and they are recorded on the corresponding web page for that given name. New citation web pages are freely created as necessary. Notice that we don’t attempt to distinguish or synthesize the information on the citation page but rather we just carefully record it with proper citations.

Also, notice that we don’t attempt to present an image of the actual historical document associated with the event at this point in the work but rather just present an accurate citation of it along with the facts of the historical document. This is to make the website practical – otherwise it would be too time consuming and would tend to bog down the research.

Later, we may put some of the images of historical documents on the biography web page of a particular ancestor to enhance the biography. This use of images of historical documents on a surname website is different from their use on the other types of genealogy website (i.e., described in the book “Getting Started on Your Genealogy Website”). Usually the historical documents are placed on the bottom “documents” layer of genealogy websites. However, in the case of the surname website, the historical documents are used as supplemental content to illustrate the biographies. In other words, they are literary content and not information content.

## Biography Layer

The biographies layer contains web pages of each individual Mannigel ancestor that has been isolated, identified, and documented. A web page is created with synthesized and proven genealogy information (birth, death, marriage), and narratives of the history of the person. As described above, the biography web pages are primitive prototypes of the final biographies that will eventually (hopefully) be written. Each biography web page will have a series of headings (e.g., “Birth,” “Marriages,” “Immigration,” “Census,” “Death,” “Children”) used to categorize the information as it is rapidly pasted into its biography web page.

This is an example of the project management style we call “Filling in the Buckets”. That is, the author uses the strategy of building the structure of the entire website first (as well as keeping it up-to-date as the work progresses). Then as new information is

discovered, there is always a “bucket” for it. The website is always structurally complete and suitable for public consumption. While incomplete, fellow genealogists located around the world can use it and collaborate with you on the topics of your genealogy website.

Also, notice that the biography layer web pages do not have any hyperlinks to the citations layer web pages. This is because any information about the ancestor on the citations web page is copied and pasted under one of the headings of the biography web page. This will also have the benefit of making a biography web page independent. Remember, the biography web pages are primitive prototypes of the final hard copy biographies.

## General Layer

The top layer is the home page of the *www.mannigel.org* website. The top layer contains a narrative of the Mannigels. Remember, the home page is the first web page (and possibly the only web page) that visitors will encounter for a website. So for a surname website, the narrative on the home page should be a compelling and enticing article on the surname family to attract the interest of fellow genealogists and people with the surname. Also, the top layer contains the index to the biographies and the index to the citation web pages (i.e., two different indexes).

The top layer will also contains the utilitarian web pages (the general web pages which are not part of the mainline genealogy presentation) but are still needed. For example, the “Links” utilitarian webpage will have reference hyperlinks that would be useful to any genealogist interested in the Mannigel surname. When the author of the website starts the surname project, he or she will have a core set of information about the target surname. Then as the research progresses, numerous resources such as specialized websites, online databases or hard copy books will be discovered as the author pursues the project. These will be invaluable to fellow genealogists researching the surname! They are captured and their hyperlinks and descriptions are put on the “Links” web page. Also, hyperlinks to maps on the web related to the surname are extremely valuable to fellow researchers. A “maps” utilitarian web page is included in the *www.mannigel.org* website which captures hyperlinks to various maps of interest to Mannigel research.

Notice that making these resources available to other genealogists is an example of the transfer of expertise from genealogist to genealogist. That is, the author of a genealogy website has accumulated a great deal of insight and sophistication which would be very valuable to fellow genealogists. The utilitarian web pages are a great way to transfer this expertise (in addition to the actual genealogy content of the website). This is an example of the added value that the author is “selling” with his or her website.

## Surname Website Hyperlink Model

The hyperlink model of the Mannigel surname website is shown in Figure 3 (note – see definition of the hyperlink model above at “Hyperlink Model,” page 4)

- The three layers (see Figure 2) are purposefully kept independent from each other and, except for the home page indexes (see below), have no interconnecting



hyperlinks (i.e., unlike most other types of genealogy websites). This greatly simplifies the process of adding newly discovered ancestors with the surname. Thus, when a new ancestor is discovered, there are no hyperlinks to be updated. All that is required is to create a citation for the new ancestor on one of the existing citation web pages for that given name or, if necessary, start a new citation page for the given name.

- The home page labeled “general” in Figure 3 has hyperlinks (G) to the various general (utilitarian) web pages (maps, links, locations, etc).
- Also, the home page will have indexes to the “biographies” member web pages (BI) and the “citations” member web pages (CI). These will provide easy access to these from the home page.

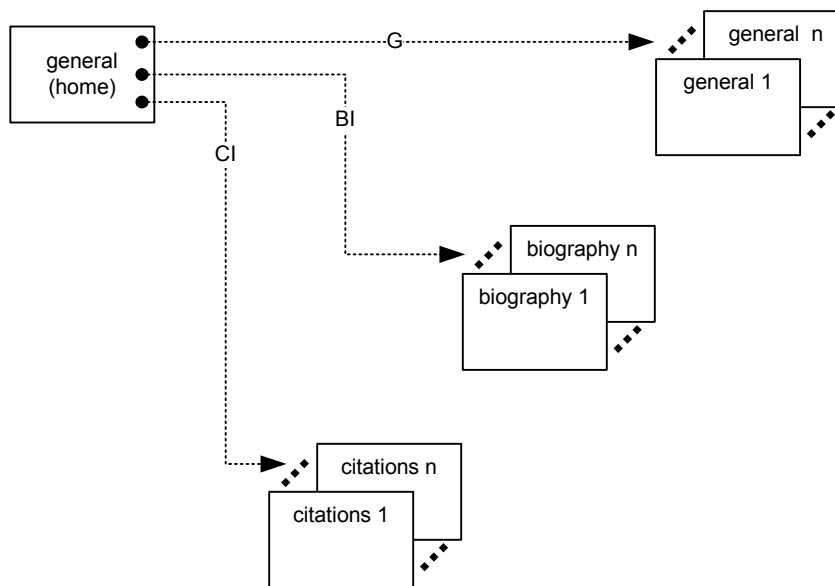


Figure 3 - Surname Website Hyperlink Model

## Implementation of [www.mannigel.org](http://www.mannigel.org)

### Domain Name:

We were able to obtain the domain name “*Mannigel.org*” years ago. However, now days, domain names for many popular surnames are difficult to obtain since they are already registered by other genealogists. No matter what, one can always obtain a pretty good domain name for any surname by just putting a serial number at the end (e.g., [www.mannigel.org](http://www.mannigel.org)).

## Website Authoring Application

We used Microsoft Word to create the *www.mannigel.org* website. Microsoft Word is perfect for this type of website – it is easy to use, we already owned it (it was installed on the computer when we purchased it), we already knew how to use it, and it is natural to write the final biographies from the biography web pages. Also, later it could be used to create a Mannigel surname book. In this sequence, one tool is used throughout.

## Hosting Plan:

We selected the “Economy” hosting plan at *www.genealogyhosting.com*. In particular, we selected the Linux operating system for this website (versus the Microsoft operating system). We had no particular reason to do this beyond the fact that a Linux website has a lot more free stuff (i.e., “Value Applications”) than a Microsoft website. In general, there are no external differences between Linux and Microsoft and the visitor would have an identical experience under either. The difference is in the software offering – Linux hosting plans usually have a lot of free web applications that can be very useful for some websites. Refer to the *www.genealogyhosting.com* website for details of the various hosting plans.

The “Economy” hosting plan gives us gigs of disk storage which we use for both the website and for online file storage. When we are on genealogy trips, we use the huge *www.mannigel.org* website disk space to upload files we encounter on the trip as explained in the article “The Genealogy Road Warrior” available on the *www.genealogyhosting.com* website. For example, each night while on a trip, we use it to upload the files on both our USB Flash Drive and our digital camera. In this way, we are always assured that the files captured or the photos taken that day are safe. It’s very easy to lose a USB Flash Drive or a digital camera which would be a disaster not because of the device which can be easily replaced but because of the invaluable files on the device. We do the upload at night back at the hotel using the lobby computer.