What's a fourth cousin, twice removed?
How to define degrees of relationship

Degrees of relationship are sometimes a little difficult to perceive, especially if you are new to such extensive relationships. Most of us stop when we reach first cousins. It is only genealogists that begin to delve into the tangled relationships that go beyond the immediate family.

First, a look at the generations of cousinship. In the above example, fourth cousins, you begin counting from the common ancestor. The common ancestor is generation zero. Generation one consists of the two children of the common ancestor, i.e., generation zero. Generation two consists of the grandchildren of generation zero, and they are first cousins to each other. Their children, the third generation, are second cousins. Two more generations are required to get to the fourth cousins. So, from the common ancestor, generation zero, to the fourth cousins, is five generations.

There are times when one descent continues for more generations than the other, i.e., one side is longer than the other. This is where you begin counting "removeds". For each additional generation that the one side needs to reach the final person in question, you add one removed. So, in the above example, there were two additional generations on one side before reaching the final individual.

Most genealogy programs are equipped with the ability to determine the relationship between two individuals. Provided that the common ancestor has been entered along with the lineage of each selected individual to the common ancestor, the computer will be able to tell you what the relationship is.