

# Cemetery Etiquette: What you Need to Know for that Cemetery Trip

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Gravestones can have useful information that could help you break through a brick wall, and grow your family tree. Although not all cemeteries are local to your area, with sites like [FindAGrave.com](http://FindAGrave.com), distant gravestones are made available to you online. If you're lucky and find that a gravestone you are looking for is near you, there are some things you'll first need to know before you visit the cemetery. With these quick tips, you'll be 'graving' in no time!

## **Be Respectful**

This really goes without saying, but sometimes we need to be reminded. A cemetery is a place for families to mourn and visit their loved ones. Be respectful of those around you.

Remember not to leave any trash when you leave, and not to disturb what might be at the memorial. If there are flowers, coins, photos, etc. be careful if you move them and put them back leaving everything as you found it. These are memorials, places where people come to remember a lost family member. Keep them as such.

## **Your mission is to preserve**

Sometimes in all the excitement of finding a grave marker that might have information we need, we forget about the basics – we want to preserve that marker and information on it, not damage it.

Many beginners will find a gravestone that they are looking for and the first thing they'll do is rub it so as to get the information onto a piece of paper. This can often damage the stone, causing chips and deteriorating the grave marker. Before you do any kind of gravestone rubbing, first check with the group that is in charge of the cemetery or find another method that is safer for the stone to get the information you need. Never use untested methods to make the gravestone more readable. People have been known to chalk the writing, clean the stone with soaps or detergents, and spread shaving cream onto the stone in hopes it will soak it in and make it more visible – these methods might get you what you need but will ultimately harm the grave marker and are not recommended by professional graveurs.

Always remember that these gravestones should and need to be preserved for the families and other genealogists down the road so do your best to keep them safe. For a more exhaustive list of what you should and should not do with gravestones, visit the [Association for Gravestone Studies](http://Association for Gravestone Studies).

## **Contact the Party in Charge of the Cemetery**

If you are visiting an active cemetery – one that still has burials occurring – try contacting or visiting the office of whoever is in charge of the cemetery. There may be one onsite or a nearby church could be running the cemetery. If you find a manager/superintendent, they might be able to quickly check records and give you the information that you are looking for or help you locate a gravestone. This may not always be the case as with older cemeteries and gravestones, records are often lost or destroyed, but it never hurts to ask. You might be surprised by what you'll find. It is also a good idea to contact them, as they will let you know what their rules are for photographing or rubbing the gravestone.

If the cemetery is no longer active, then you will need to find out who is currently in charge of the cemetery. Start by doing a quick Google search of the name of the cemetery to find out who is in charge and then you might need to make a few phone calls to see the state of the cemetery, if they have any records, and what their rules are.

Remember that some cemeteries are public and some are private – it's important to understand that there is a difference. Some are public and you can visit any time when they are open (usually dawn until dusk). However, some cemeteries are on private property and you might be trespassing if you show up without having talked to whoever is in charge. This is why it is important to do some research before you embark on your graving journey. If the cemetery is on private land, find who owns the land or is in charge of it and make a phone call to arrange a visit, ask if you can take photographs, and it's sometimes nice to give them your contact information in case they have any questions about your research project.

