

Cousin Terminology

(Information taken from several web sites)

A cousin is really a descendant of a parallel family line and you both descend from a common ancestor. Two people who are the same number of generations distant from a common ancestor are same level cousins.

Relationship Terms

Sometimes, especially when working on your family history, it's handy to know how to describe your family relationships more exactly. The definitions below should help you out. The first, second, third, etc., cousin designation tells you how many generations you have to go back in order to get to the generational level which shares parents.

Cousin (a.k.a "first cousin")

Your first cousins are the people in your family who have two of the same grandparents as you. In other words, they are the children of your aunts and uncles.

First cousins can be classified two ways: patrilineal or matrilineal, and cross- or ortho-cousins. While **ortho-cousins** are children of two brothers or two sisters; **cross-cousins** are children of a sister and brother. Someone is your **patrilineal cousin** if you are first cousins through your father (and your father's brother or sister); someone is your **matrilineal cousin** if you are first cousins through your mother (and your mother's brother or sister). Note that these terms depend on the sexes of the parents, not of the cousins.

Second Cousin

Your second cousins are the people in your family who have the same great-grandparents as you., but not the same grandparents.

Third, Fourth, and Fifth Cousins

Your third cousins have the same great-great-grandparents, fourth cousins have the same great-great-great-grandparents, and so on.

Removed

When the word "removed" is used to describe a relationship, it indicates that the two people are from different generations. You and your first cousins are in the same generation (two generations younger than your grandparents), so the word "removed" is *not* used to describe your relationship.

The words "once removed" mean that there is a difference of one generation. For example, your mother's first cousin is your first cousin, once removed. This is because your mother's first cousin is one generation younger than your grandparents and you are two generations younger than your grandparents. This one-generation difference equals "once removed."

Twice removed means that there is a two-generation difference. You are two generations younger than a first cousin of your grandmother, so you and your grandmother's first cousin are first cousins, twice removed.

People who are descended through diverging lines from a common ancestor are still cousins. If they are not of the same number of generations away from their common ancestor, a number coupled with the adjective "removed" indicates how many generations difference there is between their levels of descent from the common ancestor.

The word "removed" is used only when the relationship involves going down the family tree, to later generations.

In [kinship terminology](#), a **cousin** is a [relative](#) with whom one shares a common [ancestor](#). In modern usage, the term is rarely used when referring to a relative in one's own line of descent, or where there is a more specific term to describe the relationship: *e.g.*, brother, sister, aunt, uncle. The term *blood relative* can be used synonymously, and underlines the existence of a genetic link. A system of *degrees* and *removes* is used to describe the relationship between the two cousins and the ancestor they have in common.

The *degree* (first, second, third cousin, *et cetera*) indicates one less than the minimum number of [generations](#) between both cousins and the nearest common ancestor. For example, a person with whom one shares a grandparent (but not a parent) is a first cousin; someone with whom one shares a [great-grandparent](#) (but not a grandparent) is a second cousin; and someone with whom one shares a great-great-grandparent (but not a great-grandparent) is a third cousin; and so on.

The *remove* (once removed, twice removed, *etc.*) indicates the number of generations, if any, separating the two cousins from each other. The child of one's first cousin is one's *first cousin once removed* because the one generation separation represents one *remove*. Oneself and the child are still considered first cousins, as one's grandparent (this child's great-grandparent), as the most recent common ancestor, represents one *degree*. Equally the child of one's great-aunt or uncle (one's parent's cousin) is one's *first cousin once removed* because their grandparent (one's own great-grandparent) is the most recent common ancestor.

Non-genealogical usage often eliminates the degrees and removes, and refers to people with common ancestors merely as *cousins* or *distant cousins*. Alternatively, the terms 'second cousin' and 'first cousin once removed' are often incorrectly used interchangeably.^[1]

The system can handle kinships going back any number of generations (subject to the genealogical information being available).

Cousin Chart

A **cousin chart**, or **table of consanguinity**, is helpful in identifying the degree of cousin relationship between two individuals using their most recent common ancestor as the reference point. Cousinship between two individuals can be specifically described in degrees and removes by determining how close, generationally, the common ancestor is to each individual.

Additional modifying words are used to clarify the exact degree of relatedness between the two people. [Ordinal numbers](#) are used to specify the number of generations between individuals and a common ancestor, and further clarification of exact cousinship is made by specifying the difference in generational level between the two cousins, if any, by using *degrees of remove*. For example, "first cousins once removed" describes two individuals with the common ancestor being the grandparent of one cousin (one *degree*) and the great-grandparent of the other cousin (two "degrees"). The degree of lowest number is considered the degree. The cousins themselves are one generation different from each other (one *remove*). So, the difference between the degrees is the "removed" part of the equation.

To make this easy to remember, think about it this way. Assign 1 to the word grand and 1 to each great. Figure two people with a common ancestor by assigning each of you the totals of the grand and greats. Example: If your great-great-great grandfather is another person's grandfather, your number is 4 (great + great + great + grand = 4) and the other person's number is 1 (grand = 1). Which number is smaller? 1. So, you are first cousins. The smallest of the two persons' numbers is the degree. Now, what is the difference between the two numbers? $4 - 1 = 3$ So, you are 3 times removed.

Example 2: If your great-great-great grandparent (great + great + great + grand = 4) is another person's great-great-great grandparent (great + great + great + grand = 4), then you are 4th cousins. There is no removed, because you are on the same generational level ($4 - 4 = 0$).

Example 3: If your great grandparent (great + grand = 2) is the second person's great-great-great-great-great grandparent (great + great + great + great + great + grand = 6), then you are second cousins, four times removed. Why? Because your number is the lowest, being 2 (so, the degree is second cousin), and the difference between your two numbers is 4 ($6 - 2 = 4$), which is the number of removes (generational difference).

If one person's → is the other person's then ↓ they are ↘		Grandparent	Great-grandparent	Great-great-grandparent	Great³-grandparent	Great⁴-grandparent	Great⁵-grandparent
Grandparent	1st cousins		1st cousins once removed	1st cousins twice removed	1st cousins thrice removed	1st cousins four times removed	1st cousins five times removed
Great-grandparent	1st cousins once removed	2nd cousins		2nd cousins once removed	2nd cousins twice removed	2nd cousins thrice removed	2nd cousins four times removed
Great-great-grandparent	1st cousins twice removed	2nd cousins once removed		3rd cousins	3rd cousins once removed	3rd cousins twice removed	3rd cousins thrice removed
Great³-grandparent	1st cousins thrice removed	2nd cousins twice removed		3rd cousins once removed	4th cousins	4th cousins once removed	4th cousins twice removed
Great⁴-grandparent	1st cousins four times removed	2nd cousins thrice removed		3rd cousins twice removed	4th cousins once removed	5th cousins	5th cousins once removed
Great⁵-grandparent	1st cousins five times removed	2nd cousins four times removed		3rd cousins thrice removed	4th cousins twice removed	5th cousins once removed	6th cousins

Other types of cousins

When identical twins reproduce with the same person, the resulting children are likewise genetically indistinguishable from full siblings, although they are legally half-siblings *and* first cousins. When identical twins reproduce with siblings the resulting children are more related than half-siblings but less related than full siblings. When two siblings who are not identical twins marry the same person, the resulting children are likewise more related than half-siblings but less related than full siblings. The same situation arises when two half-siblings marry the same person. Children of double first cousins are double second cousins to each other.

Chart relationships as sentences:

- If two **first cousin** men have children with two **first cousin** women then these children are **double second cousins** because they share both sets of great-grandparents on both the maternal and the paternal family trees.
- If two female **first cousins** have children with two male **second cousins**, these children are **maternal second cousins / paternal third cousins**.
- If two siblings procreate with two **second cousins** then the resulting children would be **paternal first cousins** and **maternal third cousins**, or vice versa.
- Inbreeding: If a male and a female **third cousins** have children, then these children would be **siblings / double fourth cousins**. (See [cousin marriage](#).) This could be construed as incest in some cultures, especially if the third cousins know that they are related. Technically, it is considered inbreeding as geneticists can easily detect a genetic relationship with third cousins.^[2]
- If a male and a female **second cousins** have children with **siblings** a **brother** and **sister** and then these children are **first cousins / double third cousins**.

Double Cousins – Double first cousins occur when a set of brothers marries a set of sisters, or a brother and a sister marry another sister and brother, and they produce children. These children end up sharing all lineal and collateral relatives.

- A cross-cousin is the child of your mother's brother or of your father's sister.
- A parallel cousin, sometimes also called an ortho-cousin, is the child of your mother's sister or your father's brother.

A Little Cousinly Algebra

For those among you who like algorithms, the idea is that in the phrase “**Nth cousins R times removed**”, you go up R generations in the longer branch to get to “Nth cousins”; then you go up N generations in both branches to get to siblings. Another way to look at it is that you go N generations up the short branch of the tree, cross over to a sibling, then go N+R generations down the long branch.