

Write Now!: How to write & share a compelling family history

Family History Formats

| | |
|--|--|
| Narrative | Tells the story of a group of ancestors. Can focus on one or more family lines, and one or more generations. |
| Memoir | Deals with a specific period of an individual's life. |
| Biography | A written record of a single ancestor's entire life. |
| Cookbook | Shares family recipes while writing about their creators. |
| Photo Album | Presents your family history through captioned photos in chronological order. |
| Letters & Diaries | A compilation of letters and diaries can showcase the voices of your ancestors. |
| Newsletters | Family stories and updates can be fun when done in a newspaper style. |
| Pedigree charts | These can easily be created with various genealogical software programs. Gives lots of information, but not very readable. |
| Combination of narrative, photos and pedigree charts | Most family histories combine these elements to be both interesting and informative. |

Getting over Writer's Block

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Religion | What church did your ancestors attend? Where was it located? What did it look like? What songs did they sing? |
| Inventions | What conveniences appeared during their lives? Describe sewing machines, scrub boards, sickles, telephone switchboards and the role they played in your ancestors' lives. |
| Newspapers | What were the headlines on the day your ancestors were born, married, died? What were the prices for food and household items? Obituaries and articles can give interesting personal details. |
| Family Traits | What creative abilities run in the family? (singing, artists, teachers, writers, seamstresses) |
| Health | Were there any illnesses? What were the causes of death and how might this have affected the family? |
| Possessions | Include photos and descriptions of valued possessions: jewellery, quilts, tools, toys, books, furniture, pets, automobiles |
| Locations | What type of neighbourhood did your ancestors live in? Are there any photos or maps of the area and home, then and now? Describe the area. Did other family members live nearby? |
| Occupations | What type of job did your ancestors work at? What did the work involve? How many hours a day did they work? Were there dangers associated with the job? |
| Physical descriptions | What did your ancestors look like? Create a written description to go along with a photo. Are there recognizable family traits? What kind of clothing were they wearing? What is in the background? |
| Education | How much schooling did your ancestors receive? Where did they go to school? Describe the school or teacher. |
| Emigration | Why did your ancestors emigrate? Were they part of a large group/movement? Is there a photo of the ship or type of ship they sailed on? |
| Family Stories | What stories have been passed down about ancestors? These stories, even when unverified, can be interesting additions. |

How do you write an interesting family history?

- Write as though you're telling a story.
- A good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Start on a dramatic high point, then go back and tell the story chronologically.
- Craft your facts into a nonfiction narrative using fiction techniques:
 - Character
 - Plot
 - Dialogue
 - Detail
 - Flashback or flash forward
 - Suspense
- Be specific about details.
- Describe your settings using the five senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, sound.
- Warning: Don't change the facts or be unfaithful to what really happened.

Ethics

- Be considerate; ask permission to publish information about living relatives
- "Tell, don't dwell"

Useful books, websites & online articles

Carmack, Sharon De Bartolo. *Tell it Short: A Guide to Writing Your Family History in Brief*. Salt Lake City: Scattered Leaves Press, 2016.

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *You Can Write Your Family History*. Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 2003.

Polking, Kirk. *Writing Family Histories and Memoirs*. Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 1995.

Sturdevant, Katherine Scott. *Bringing Your Family History to Life Through Social History*. Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 2000.

Yates, Susan & Ioannou, Greg. *A Book of One's Own: Turning your family history, travel journal, memoirs, children's story, poetry, novel, recipes or self-help guide into a book*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1999.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. 30th Anniversary Edition. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006.

www.genwriters.com - Ideas and resources to bring your family history to life

www.genealogy.com/21_prze.html - Creating a Family Book: from Planning to Printing: Your Family in Print by Donna Przecha

www.genealogy.com/74_sharon.html - The Secret to Writing a Compelling Family History: You Too Can Be an Author by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

www.aagsnc.org/articles/writing.htm - Writing Your Family History: From Idea to Manuscript by Annette Madden

Online self-publishing companies

Blurb.com

Lulu.com

Xlibris.com

CreateSpace.com

Family Search Memories – allows you to upload photos and stories