



10 steps for writing your family history

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1) Choose a Format

- **Simple photocopied booklet** shared only with family members
- **Bound book** to serve as a reference for other genealogists
- **Family newsletter**,
- **Web site**
- **Memoir/Narrative** - A combination of story and personal experience.
- **Cookbook** - Write about the people who created the recipes.
- **Scrapbook or Album**: If you have a large collection of family photos and memorabilia.

2) Define the Scope

- **Single Line of Descent** - Begins with the earliest known ancestor for a particular surname and follows him/her through a single line of descent to you. Each chapter of the book would cover one ancestor or generation.
- **All Descendants Of...** - Begins with an individual or couple and covers all of their descendants, with chapters organized by generation.
- **The Grandparents** - Includes a section on each of your four grandparents, or eight great-grandparents and so on. Each individual section focuses on one grandparent and works backwards through their ancestry or forward from his/her earliest known ancestor.

3) Set Deadlines

Get each piece done within a specified time frame by scheduling writing time. Revising and polishing can always be done later.

4) Choose a Plot & Themes

Thinking of your ancestors as characters in your family history story, what problems and obstacles did your ancestors face?

Examples of themes include:

Immigration/Migration
Rags to Riches
Pioneer or Farm Life
War Survival

5) Do Your Background Research

Investigate your ancestor's occupation to gain greater understanding into his daily activities. Read up on the fashions, art, transportation and common foods of the time period and location.

6) Organize Your Research

Create a timeline for each ancestor that you plan to write about. Then use them to help develop an outline for your narrative. You may choose to order your material in many different ways: chronologically, geographically, by character, or by theme.

7) Choose a Starting Point

Pick out an interesting fact, record or story about your ancestors and open your narrative with it. You can later use flashback to fill in the reader on the events which lead up to your opening story.

8) Use Records and Documents

Include short excerpts from diary entries, will excerpts, military accounts, obituaries and other records which offer first-hand accounts of your family's history. Anything written directly by your ancestor is worth including, but you may also find interesting accounts that mention your ancestor in the records of neighbors and other family members. Photos, pedigree charts, maps and other illustrations can also add interest to a family history and be sure to include detailed captions for any photos or illustrations that you incorporate.

9) Make it Personal

Anyone who reads your family history will likely be interested in the facts, but what they'll most enjoy and remember are the everyday details - favorite stories and anecdotes, embarrassing moments and family traditions.

10) Include an Index and Source Citations

Include a surname index and a place index if your ancestors moved around a lot to make it much easier for the casual reader to find the portions of your book that detail the people in which they are interested.

Source citations are an essential part of any family book, to both provide credibility to your research, and to leave a trail that others can follow to verify your findings.