

Preservation Primer, Part 2: The Basics of Writing Our Stories to Preserve Our Families' Histories

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Beginning to Write & Record Your Family Stories

One likely has heard numerous times that one cannot be serious about preserving family history and family stories for future generations if one is not spending consequential time dealing with living memory through writing. We perceive writing as hard to do, maybe impossible, so we don't engage in it. It doesn't have to be that way.

It is key not to focus on writing right, correctly or perfectly but rather to focus on doing the actual writing. The exercise of writing should not be viewed as an assignment or research paper but rather an opportunity to capture your unique ideas and events with your unique words. We need to break out of the academic mindset of being graded on our writing. Don't write the "right" way but write your way and always. Other keys include:

- Don't necessarily start writing at the beginning, whatever that is.
- Don't think of sitting down to write a book.
- Think in events and episodes.
- Write in specifics—specific people, specific events, and/or specific organizations.
- Allow one event, memory, or story lead you to another event, memory or story, and write about them all.
- Write fully rather than writing to get done. One is never done writing.
- Engage your senses in the writing process: sight, smell, sound, touch, taste.

Vital Keys to Writing and Writing Well

- Read Constantly
- Write Daily
- Write where you're comfortable; write in different places and at different times of the day.
- Experiment with writing accessories that have their own meaning.
- As previously stated, engage all of your senses as memory triggers: Sight—Sound—Smell—Touch—Taste.
- Write-up each of your most frequent forms of communication: Email, Telephone, Letters. Put the communiqué in context.
- Listen!
- Write up your research!
- Work toward "contexting" all your communiqués.
- Write about your feelings and your perception of others' feeling.
- Your unique words—concisely—about your unique experiences.

Some Strategies and Sources for Ideas

If you are having a challenge getting started actually doing some writing, you might want to review various suggestions and lists of steps. It is important not to be overly invested in following any set of steps completely but rather, choosing those steps that make sense for you—that work for you.

"5 Photos Genealogists Should be Taking Now" as published on LegacyFamilyTree.com and read on 16May2022. **Taking and Writing about Now!**

https://news.legacyfamilytree.com/legacy_news/2022/05/5-photos-genealogists-should-be-taking-now.html

1. In the kitchen
2. Don't forget your pets
3. Multigenerational photos
4. Gravestone photos with people in the photo
5. Photos of your passions

"18 Writing Tips for 2018: How to Tell Personal and Family Stories with Confidence" as published on FamilySearch.org and read on 25May2022.

www.familysearch.org/en/blog/18-writing-tips-for-2018-how-to-tell-personal-and-family-stories-with-confidence

1. Own Your Story
2. Tell Favorite Stories Aloud
3. Make a Time Line of Major Life Events
4. Be Specific
5. Just Start
6. Make a List of Stories to Tell
7. Forget About Chronology
8. Use Memory Triggers
9. Let Your Thoughts Percolate
10. Gather Memories from Other People
11. Use Your Handwriting
12. Write the Way You Speak
13. Don't Stress about Grammar and Spelling
14. Write in List Form
15. Make It a Regular Practice
16. Keep Multiple Journals
17. Curate Your Own Writing
18. Make Some of Your Stories Permanent

"#52Stories Printables" are writing prompts published on FamilySearch.org and read 25May2022.

www.familysearch.org/en/blog/52stories-printables

"9 Tips for Getting Started on Writing Your Family History" as published on FamilyTreeMagazine.com and read on 25May2022.

<https://familytreemagazine.com/storytelling/tips-getting-started-writing-family-history>

Ancestors, Season 2: "Writing a Family History" as read on FamilySearch 25May 2022.

www.byutv.org/player/172a35b3-3e43-4f9c-b90e-79e593d26360/ancestors-writing-a-family-history?listid=4fe0fee5-0d3c-4a29-b725-e4948627f472&listindex=2&q=%22family%20history%22

Kimberly Powell's "10 Steps to Writing Your Family History" as published on About.com and updated on ThoughtCo, Aug. 27, 2020, thoughtco.com/steps-to-writing-your-family-history-1422877.

- 1) Choose a Format for Your Family History
 - Memoir/Narrative
 - Cookbook
 - Scrapbook or Album
- 2) Define the Scope of Your Family History

- Single Line of Descent
 - All Descendants Of...
 - The Grandparents
- 3) Set Deadlines You Can Live With
 - 4) Choose a Plot & Themes
 - Immigration/Migration
 - Rags to Riches
 - Pioneer or Farm Life
 - Rising Out of Slavery
 - War Survival
 - 5) Do Your Background Research
 - 6) Organize Your Research
 - 7) Choose a Starting Point
 - 8) Don't be Afraid to Use Records and Documents
 - 9) Make it Personal
 - 10) Include an Index and Source Citations

Family History Writing Prompts (Over 40!) by Family Tree Editors
www.familytreemagazine.com/storytelling/writing/family-history-writing-prompts/

Amy Johnson Crow's "The Fallacy of Writing Your Family History"
www.amyjohnsoncrow.com/the-fallacy-of-writing-your-family-history/

"20 Reasons Why You Should Write Your Family History" as published on the New York Public Library's website and read on 25May2022. www.nypl.org/blog/2015/02/09/reasons-to-write-your-family-history

1. You'll feel wiser.
2. First person narratives and family histories are important historical documents.
3. You are an important person. You have things to pass on, to your children, to your local history society, to unknown future generations.
4. You and your family are important to somebody, probably many somebodies.
5. Family trees are abstract. Stories add depth.
6. Memories over time become fragmented and distorted. People may not remember the things you told them but did not write down.
7. Writing your family history gives you the chance to depict your ancestors how you see fit.
8. There is a need for diverse family histories about those who have not been represented well in history texts.
9. There is a need for more family histories documenting female lines.
10. There is a need for more family histories about families who are not affluent.
11. Family histories humanize the people you know or knew and remember for those who did not know them.
12. Information raises questions. Genealogy research has brought new facts into your life.
13. It may help you understand your current family dynamics.
14. It will help you build or solidify a sense of family.
15. Writing is reflective. Writing is investing in yourself.
16. It can be therapeutic.
17. Don't take for granted that the lives of your ancestors are lost. Evidence of the people they have been exists somewhere and is discoverable.
18. It will have a wider impact than you might imagine.
19. Family members and even distant cousins may become more forward in contributing documents, photos, and stories for your genealogical research.

20. You will be encouraged to archive and preserve the documents on which your family history research is based: certificates, letters, diaries, etc.

Valerie Holladay's "Ten Easy Steps..." as published in Ancestry Magazine, July/August 2003. (A bit dated but solid tips. Author died in 2011.)

1. Begin by doing a little background study on any available family histories.
2. Recruit a family member to help you.
3. Give yourself deadlines to meet.
4. Set boundaries on what to include.
5. Get organized.
6. Follow a timeline.
7. Fill in the blanks.
8. Keep your source list updated as you work; don't put off doing it until the end.
9. Prepare a detailed index.
10. Ask family members to review copies and offer comments and corrections.

Example of writing.

THE BLUE DRESS WITH WHITE FLOWERS

Patti Ambrogio • Rochester, New York

Nanny Katie Ingraham was the family matriarch. She entered the kitchen on the morning of Kelly's wedding, wearing the blue dress with white flowers.

"You look beautiful, Nanny," I said.

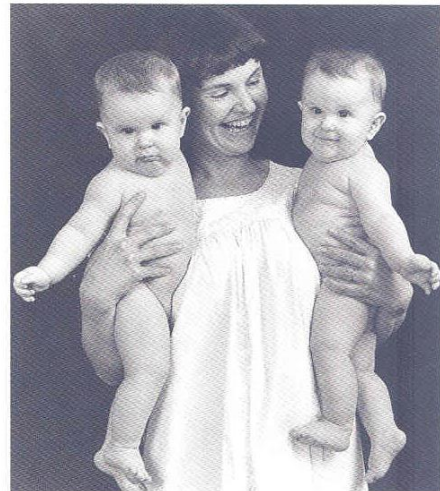
She turned and looked at me across a room crowded with family and bellowed, "This dress put me out eighty-eight dollars and I expect to wear it again!"

So I married her grandson.

Katie Ingraham taught me how to make Isabel Van Wie's 14-Day Pickles with "salt to float an egg" and "alum the size of a walnut." I remember how she slowly turned the first small cucumbers from the garden in her hand like diamonds.

She was too sick to wear her blue dress to my wedding, but her spirit guided that day and has continued to shape my life. When I gave birth to identical twin girls, I learned that Katie had lost a twin sibling at birth and that she had hoped for a twin birth in her lifetime to "put things right."

Molly Ingraham and Jesse Kate bear the name of their great-grandmother. We "put away" pickles and tomatoes each summer and tell these stories.



***Our Grandmothers: Loving Portraits by 74 Granddaughters* [New York: Welcome Enterprises, Inc. 1998.]**