

Family History Writing Class

Good genealogy is not just gathering facts from records. Good genealogy also involves evaluating what we find and analyzing how all of our findings fit together. Good genealogy also means getting our findings into some format where we can share it with others whether with living relatives or preserved for future generations.

Writing is about memory triggers - anything that brings memory to the front of the brain.

1. Sight - visual memories, go there if you can to the area of school or where someone was born or an event happened. Is it the same?
2. Sounds - music, clothes pin on the bicycle wheel, the sound of thunder, the soft sounds a baby makes as he falls asleep, the rat-a-tat-tat of a jack hammer, the whoosh and boom of fireworks, the sound of water cascading over rocks in the stream.
3. Smells - the strongest memory trigger - things made at home like fresh baked bread, after shave lotion, fresh mown grass, watermelon, fresh peaches, stew simmer on the stove.
4. Taste - a spoonful of cold ice cream, a bite of cinnamon roll, a grimace at the taste of lemon, a bite of melt-in-your-mouth cotton candy, a bite of a crunchy apple.
5. Touch - how does it feel? Walking on the beach with the sand between your toes, the silky touch of hair, a warm blanket from the dryer or sheets fresh off the clothes line, the fuzzy peach, a brand new book with crisp pages offering adventure.

Writing one thing gets you into other memories. Retrieving memory is important.

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Pay attention as to whose eyes are seeing the event - a mother, a sister, a child, a grandfather

Don't tell it all up front - progressive disclosure makes it interesting.

Carry a notebook and write down good ideas in a notebook. In the night have a post a note and pencil by your bedside and write a few words down so you don't forget by morning.

Paint word pictures. A picture is worth a thousand words. Sometimes a word is worth a thousand pictures.

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In considering Family Histories, remember authors cannot put anything into histories they do not know or have. If the event wasn't recorded by someone, it can't go in the history.

It's okay not to have wonderful heroic stories about our ancestors unless they exist. But the author still needs to know about them.

Some sources are more true than others. Choose the event written closest to the date by a person who is closest to the event

Don't wish for famous blue-blooded or rich ancestors. Instead measure their value by their honest, the trials they were presented with, and what they did with them, their humor, their heroism, their love.

Remember some family legends tend to be just that - legends. Try to be grateful for what the author has gathered and presented - help where you can - ask for help, too.