



FAMILY HISTORY WRITING WORKBOOK

2025



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Introduction

This workbook complements your learning throughout the Family History Writing Online Course. It's designed to support you as you reflect on your personal journey, helping you move from intention to action. Use it to plan your project, explore ideas, capture insights from each session, and gradually shape your unique family history narrative.

You'll find guided exercises, prompts, and space to collect thoughts, stories and sources—all structured around the stages of the course. It's your personalized companion to stay focused and inspired.

We encourage you to revisit this workbook regularly—both during and after the course—as your vision evolves and your writing takes shape.



Why Writing Your Family History Matters

These questions are designed to help you connect with your personal motivations and the emotional core of your family history writing. Take a few moments to reflect on what draws you to this work, what you already know, and which purpose speaks to you most. Your answers will form a strong foundation for everything you create throughout this course.

Why are you drawn to family history writing right now?



What parts of your family history do you already know and feel connected to?

Which of the five reasons we discussed today resonated most with you—and why?



How to Overcome Doubts, Challenges and Roadblocks

Every family history writing journey comes with its own set of roadblocks—whether it's time, doubt, or simply not knowing where to begin. These prompts are designed to help you reflect on where you are right now and explore practical ways to move forward. There's no right or wrong answer—just take a moment to get honest with yourself and set a small, supportive next step.

Which of the stages do you currently identify with most—and why?

Which roadblocks you've experienced so far in your writing journey?



What is your biggest challenge right now?

What is the one small step you could take this week to overcome that specific challenge?



Laying the Foundations of Your Family History

Now that we've explored the stages of the writing journey, it's time to define your personal path forward. These questions will help you clarify your scope, goal, and audience—three key pillars that influence the depth, tone, and structure of your family history project. Take your time with each prompt and reflect honestly.

There's no single "right" way to approach this; the goal is to find what feels meaningful and sustainable for you. By the end of this exercise, you'll have a clearer picture of who you're writing about, why you're writing, and who you're writing for.

To help you get started, we also invite you to choose the first ancestor you'd like to write about. Selecting someone you feel connected to or have unique material about can make the writing process more engaging and manageable.



What is your scope?

The scope of your family history defines how wide or narrow your project will be—whether focusing on a single ancestor or tracing generations across branches.

What scope resonates most with you? Why?

Are there limitations (e.g., available documents or photos) that will influence your scope?



What is your goal?

Your goal gives purpose to your family history project—whether it's publishing a book, creating a keepsake, or organizing research for future generations.

What is your primary goal for this project?

What specific outputs do you envision?



Who is your audience?

Understanding your audience will shape how you present your family history—ensuring it resonates with those who will cherish it most.

Who is your intended audience?

What format or style will best engage your audience?



Who to start with?.

Finding an ancestor you feel connected to makes it easier to get started and build momentum.

Who is the first ancestor you want to write about? Why?

What information, sources, photos do you have available related to the selected person?



The many faces of family history writing

Now that you've defined your goal, scope, and audience, it's time to think about the format and structure that will best support your vision. These questions are designed to help you begin shaping your family history project in a way that feels both meaningful and manageable.

If you're still unsure about your exact direction, start with the most flexible format, such as organizing research & preserving memories in individual vignettes. This allows you to begin writing without having to commit to a final structure right away—and you can always adapt as your project evolves.

Which of these formats appeals to you most, and why?



Outline a simple structure, table of contents, or list of potential vignettes/chapters for your preferred format.



How to Turn Facts into Stories

In this section, we're shifting our focus from information-gathering to storytelling. These questions will guide you through evaluating your current organizational approach and inspire you to uncover the narrative potential of the sources you already have.

By working closely with one specific document or photo, you'll begin to see how facts can be transformed into meaningful stories that evoke emotion and deepen connection. Let this be a first step toward turning research into rich, engaging family history.

Have you used any organizational methods before? Were they effective? Why or why not?

What challenges do you currently face in keeping your materials organized?



Think through your organization system for this family history project



Choose one direct source from your collection. What story does it anchor? What emotions or moments does it inspire?

How can this source spark curiosity or reveal new insights about your ancestor's story?



Develop a narrative based on your selected source.



How to add depth and color to your story

In this session, we explored how to enrich your family history writing by placing your ancestors in a broader historical and social context. The following exercises will help you think critically about how indirect sources—about housing, education or religion—can offer valuable insight into your ancestor's life.

You'll also begin to explore how to visually support your narrative and identify possible resources to include.

Choose one ancestor to focus on as you complete the tasks, and use the prompts to begin layering context and texture into your story.



Create a table to align your ancestor's life milestones with significant international, national, and local events. Think about how these events might have shaped their experiences.



Choose an ancestor you know little about. Pick two indirect sources (e.g., military service, housing) and write a brief narrative using the questions from the presentation as prompts.



List the types of visuals you could use for your selected ancestor (e.g., maps, photographs, letters). Plan how to source these visuals based on the suggestions from the presentation.



Where to look for additional information

In this session, we explored a range of sources and digital platforms that can help you bring your family history to life. Now it's your turn to experiment with them directly. These exercises will guide you in using Hungaricana and Arcanum to gather visuals and contextual materials related to your ancestor's environment and story. Let curiosity lead the way—you never know which image, article, or document will become a key piece of your narrative puzzle.

Search your ancestor's town or village on Hungaricana Write down 2–3 images, maps, or documents you found that could help illustrate the world your ancestor lived in.

Look up a surname or keyword on Arcanum Newspapers Write a short paragraph about something interesting you discovered or how you might use this kind of article to enrich your story.



How to Create a Cohesive Narrative

In this final session, we shifted our focus to refining and strengthening your family history project. After weeks of building content and structure, it's time to take a step back and look at your work as a whole.

These exercises will guide you through a thoughtful review process across three key areas: consistency, flow, and enhancement. You'll reflect on your tone and style, ensure your project reads smoothly from section to section, and plan improvements that make your narrative clearer, more compelling, and visually engaging.

Whether you're close to completion or just taking shape, these exercises are all about elevating your work—and getting it ready to share.



Maintaining consistency

Consistency ensures your project feels cohesive and polished. From tone to formatting, this section helps you review and maintain a unified style.

**Reflect on your tone. Is it formal, conversational, or narrative?
Does it align with your goal?**

Write down three key elements of style to stick to (e.g., first-person narration, use of dialogue, or avoiding over-detailed descriptions)



Review two parts of your project—are they consistent in tone, structure, and style? If not, why?

List three ways you could improve consistency in your project.



Creating flow

Flow ensures your project moves smoothly from one section to another, keeping readers engaged. It's about connecting your ideas, stories, and sections seamlessly.

Does your project follow a logical order? List any sections you might rearrange to improve readability.

Is the pace balanced? Are there sections that feel too rushed or too detailed? Briefly note where adjustments are needed.



Write transition sentences between three sections of your project.



Enhancing your project

Enhancing your project involves polishing it with details, visuals, and accuracy. This is where your project transforms from informative to captivating.

Identify two facts in your project that need verification.

List three visuals you plan to include (e.g., photos, maps, artifacts) and their placement.



Identify one person you'll ask for feedback and the specific area you'd like input on.

Note any final additions or changes needed to elevate your project.

Checklist

Content:

- ☐ Have you answered the essential "Who, What, Where, When, Why" questions?
- ☐ Are all sections logically organized and consistent in tone and style?
- ☐ Have you verified facts with credible sources?

Visuals:

- ☐ Have you added relevant photos, maps, or illustrations?
- ☐ Are captions and image credits included where necessary?

Technical:

- ☐ Is the layout visually appealing and easy to read?
- ☐ Are chapters or sections clearly labeled with headings or titles?
- ☐ Are all spelling, grammar, and formatting errors corrected?

Feedback:

- ☐ Did you share your draft with family members or a trusted audience for review?
- ☐ Did you incorporate constructive feedback effectively?

Final Touches:

- ☐ Are there personal touches like reflections, anecdotes, or dedications?
- ☐ Is your project stored securely, either digitally or physically?
- ☐ If relevant, have you planned for publishing or distribution?



There is no one perfect way to
approach family history.

By engaging with these sessions
and reflecting on your process,
you are building a meaningful,
lasting legacy—a family history
that will inspire, preserve, and
connect generations to come.