

It's All About Me...



Writing Your Personal History



Leaders Guide

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Agenda:

- Welcome and Introduction of Presenters 1 minute
 - Review Agenda 1 minutes
 - Review Goals and Objectives 1 minutes
 - Introduction (page 4) 1 minute
 - Why Create a Personal History? (page 4) 2 minutes
 - Handout #1 – “Who I Am” worksheet 4 minutes
 - When Should I Create My Personal History? (page 4) 2 minutes
 - Two Basic Methods of Writing Your Personal History (page 5) ...3 minutes
 - Different Types of Personal History (page 6) 2 minutes
 - Before You Begin Writing (page 9) 2 minutes
 - Thoughts on Writing Your Personal History (page 9) 3 minutes
 - What Should a Personal History Contain? (page 11)2 minutes
 - Where Do I Begin? (page 12) 2 minutes
 - How to Begin (page12) 2 minutes
 - Start Writing (page 13) 3 minutes
 - Then What? (page 14)1 minute
 - What About Distributing It? (page 14)1 minute
 - Review and Evaluate What You Have Written (page 14) 2 minutes
 - After the Review (page 15) 2 minutes
 - Decide How You Want Your Finished History to Look (page 15) 2 minutes
 - Writing Challenges (page 15) 2 minutes
 - Conclusion (page 16) 2 minutes
 - Question/Comments10 minutes
 - Handout #2 – Resources for Information2 minutes
 - Handout #3 – Personal History Prompts/What to Write About...2 minutes
 - Handout #4 – Expert Tips 2 minutes
 - Handout #5 – Sample Writing 1 minute
- 60 total minutes**

Note: PowerPoint presentation of this lesson is available. Contact Scott Teeples @ phone/text 541-891-6456 or sfteeples@charter.net

Goals and Objectives

- Participants will gain an understanding of the importance of writing their personal history and why it would be important to their family members.
- Participants will gain an understanding of the various styles of writing your personal history.
- Participants will gain an understanding of what types of things to write about.
- Participants will gain a knowledge of where to find information on their personal history.

Items That May Be Needed for Presentation

- “It’s All About Me... Writing Your Personal History” Leaders Guide
- Various Activities and Handouts
- Pencils or pens for each attendee
- Blank paper for each attendee
- *PowerPoint Presentation on “It’s All About Me... Writing Your Personal History” (if needed)
- *Computer
- *PowerPoint projector
- *Screen or wall to project presentation on
- *Computer/projector table
- *Electrical cords/power bars as needed
 - *only needed if PowerPoint presentation is u:



References and Credit Given to:

- www.lds.org Various articles on writing your personal history.
- Why I Should Write My Life Story by Robert Warnick

It's All About Me... Writing Your Personal History

Introduction

A personal history is one way of leaving a legacy for descendants to treasure for generations. It is important to retain accuracy of information when creating your personal history. If you leave it to someone else to create it, he or she can only rely on their memories of you and secondhand stories that may not accurately reflect your life.

Why Create a Personal History?

Ask yourself these questions – if your parents, grandparents, and other ancestors did not leave life histories, do you wish they would had? Do you wish you could read about their lives? If so, it is likely for your descendants to feel the same way if you don't. A record of your life can be a great gift to those who come after you. Words in print can be read and reread, pondered over, and returned to. The words your teenager rejects now may become clear and precious when he or she rereads them later in life.

You could have a great effect on those who follow you. Your example, trials, and triumphs can strengthen and motivate others. A famous, biblical example is Job of the Old Testament, who suffered many trials. "Oh, that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever!" he mourned (Job 19:23-4 KJV). His words were written, and so his triumph over tragedy and his faith have remained an example of devotion to people of the world for thousands of years.

Writing your history can also provide you with an opportunity to evaluate your life. It may help to clarify your direction in life. Writing about your past, even if it was not idyllic, can help you cope with feelings and create an opportunity to find understanding and forgiveness.

Note: Do Activity – Handout #1 – "Who I Am" worksheet

When Should I Create My Personal History?

There is no better time than now. Do not put off writing until you believe you'll have more time, or until you'll retire. Our expectations of how much time we

have to do all that we need or want to so do not usually match that of what happens. In addition, you never know how long you may live, so do not procrastinate.

No one else can write your personal history the way you can. The story is about your life, and it should be written by you. However, the longer you wait to write it, the more details are likely to slip away and be forgotten.

When writing your story, set realistic and specific goals. For example, you could set a goal to complete a first draft in three months. A final draft could be ready to review within six. By the end of nine months, you could have a finished copy ready for distribution to your family members. The time allotted to write your history is subjective. It may be more reasonable for you to write a chapter a week for the next years or write about one subject per week or even a page per day. Do what you can but do it regularly and consistently.

Your history isn't limited to just subjects. It may be easier to write about the different stages of your life like preschool, grade school, high school, etc. Breaking up your history into segments like these makes the task easier to accomplish.

Two Basic Types of Writing Your Personal History (The Choice is Yours... I choose #2)

1. The Hard Way... A Complete Book of Your Life

- This method would be a complete book with all of the events that happened in your life.
- This could be a very difficult task to compile and write about everything that happened in your life.
- This method could take several months and often several years.
- For some of us, sitting down and finishing a comprehensive personal history can be quite difficult. Notice that I said finish and not begin because it seems like we're all very good at beginning things, but it's the finishing that makes the difference.

2. The Better Way or Easier Way... A “Remembering” Document

- Instead of starting out chronologically stating your life events (year by year that is), try compiling stories by topic. If you write your history year by year, it can take forever to finish, and you’ll probably be bothered thinking that you’ve left something out.
- The problem with writing your history starting from when you were born until the present is that your history usually becomes more of a list of things that happened in your life with short paragraphs explaining important events.
- Those events probably merit more than just a paragraph or two, but when you’re putting it together year by year, your history starts to get long, and you feel content with simply listing what happened.
- Well, here’s a way to write that personal history and finish it bit by bit. Believe it or not, you’ll end up with a better history.
- Using this method, you will write short thoughts about little parts of your life. It would include the thoughts about many different events in your life. Each thought might be a few sentences or even a few paragraphs.
- This method would normally be much easier than a complete Life History Book. You would only need to write about those memories you can remember. The thoughts could be placed in any order you feel best.

Different Types of Personal Histories

You can preserve your life history and memories in many ways. The following are a few ideas:

Written Biographies

A written biography is a great way to record personal histories for those who enjoy writing. They can include any of the following:

- Personal account of events in your life.
- Photographs of events, family, friends, homes you grew up in, places you’ve traveled, and other experiences of interest in your life. Photographs are good visual aides to supplement your history.
- Copies of family records, such as your birth and marriage certificates, school records, diplomas, religious certificates, awards, and other records of interest.

- What you decide to include is up to you, and any physical documents or images can help round out your words.

Journals

- Journals are excellent to preserve your history. Where a personal history tends to be broader in scope and generally covers a greater period of time, a journal can preserve the day-to-day or week-to-week events of your life. A journal provides a more intimate and detailed account of your daily experiences.
- They may be easier for someone to write. Although journal writing can span over large amounts of time, it is done in small increments rather than covering a lot of information at once.
- Journals have a more personal feeling to them. They often contain insights, expressions or emotion, observations about events and how they affect you and those around you, musings, and much more.
- You may also choose to include drawings or photographs within the journal, which can add an interesting dimension.
- Journals are not only a good way for those after you to see into your personal, but also a medium for you to reflect on during your life to see how you've grown.

Narratives

- Narratives are another form of personal history. This particular kind of narrative documents memorable events and are usually brief.
- Many people find it useful to set aside a time each week to write their narratives. For example, one woman spends an hour writing each Sunday afternoon while her young children take a nap. During each session, she writes two or three short narratives.
- These narratives can later be polished and compiled into a longer history.

Records of Milestones

- Creating a record of milestones is similar to keeping a journal, except it tends to be added to less frequently.
- It is a record of important events like birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, death, life-changing experience, and major accomplishments. They also include your feelings regarding the milestones.

Scrapbooking

- This is also a popular form to preserve memories and can be a great alternative or addition to a written personal history. Scrapbooks focus on documenting special events using photographs and other memorabilia.
- Scrapbooks tend to not be as comprehensive as written history, but they provide excellent visual documentation.
- Scrapbook supplies and classes are often readily available.

Oral Histories

- An oral history preserves the voice of someone. It is a great alternative for those who do not feel that they have the skills or desire to write. Those who struggle with writing may find it easier to sit down and talk about their lives. For many people, having someone record someone from their lives is a fun and deeply touching experience.

Electronic Recordings

- With the development of electronic devices, like video equipment and audio recorders, recording history is easier than ever. Using this equipment to record your history, you can include much more than is typically found in a written history.
- These can include recordings of your voice, of you singing or playing an instrument, among other visual and auditory images.
- A thing to be aware of when deciding to record electronically is that they can deteriorate or become outdated. Computer discs, hardware, and software programs can become outdated over time, and this process is becoming faster, with technology changing vastly over a few short years. After a few years, you may find that you have difficulty finding a computer or program that will read what you have recorded.
- You should review the medium your recorded with on a regular basis. Once a year it best. Tapes should be played back annually to prevent the sound from bleeding through the tape.
- Before it gets harder to find equipment to play or read what you have recorded, it is a good idea to transfer your history to an updated medium.

Online Photo Books

- With the availability of the Internet, it is possible to create a fine quality history book online and have it delivered to your door. You can add

at many photographs and as much text as you would like. The company then prints out as many books as you want and ships them to you. These can then be distributed to friends and family members.

Before You Begin Writing

After considering your options, decide what method you would like to use to record your history. Whether you are going to write, video tape, or make a photo- or scrapbook, you should consider doing the following:

- Gathering everything you can find about your life that might help you remember events.
- Organizing the items per the type of history you plan to create.
- Carrying note cards with you to record memories as they come to mind. Often memories will come up at inconvenient times. Note cards provide an easy way to record them, regardless of when they arise.
- Elaborating on some of your memories as you have the time. Add more details that what you may have written on your note cards.
- Talking into an audio- or video-recording device to record some preliminary ideas. Memories may also come easier and with more detail if you are speaking them. You may want to transcribe the recording later or use it as a starting point for writing.
- Asking relatives and friends to share memories and stories they have of you. These recollections are extremely valuable; others often remember events that happened when you were too young to remember them, or they might remember things that didn't seem important to you when they happened or memories you may have forgotten.

Thoughts on Writing Your Personal History

For many, starting to write a personal history can seem overwhelming. Many people feel they haven't done anything extraordinary in their life that others would want to hear about, and the thought of piecing everything together can be intimidating.

Everyone has something they can share. Many might say "I'm not famous. I don't have anything that would be newsworthy, but I have stories." And so, it begins.

Often, favorite family stories are great starting-off points for compiling a personal history. Sometimes, the beginning starts with simply thinking of a story or event from an individual's life.

Don't think of the whole finished product. As you write, ideas will come.

In recording a personal history, it is important to write as if you are talking to someone. By doing so, readers will feel more connected to the story, and, in turn, their family.

In an effort to keep things organized, think of using such things as using a box or file folder that holds cards with different titles on them, a loose-leaf binder, a notebook, an app for a phone or tablet that allows individuals to record notes as they are on the go, or a working document saved to their computer that they can continually add ideas to and edit. Photos can be saved along with the titles to accompany the history.

If you think of a story, write down a title that will help you remember it. Divide your life into periods or sections. Choose sections that best match your ideas and stories.

Recognizing there is not one right way to divide things up. Sections based on their age or time frame of life make it easy to categorize things in a general time frame, especially when exact dates or ages are not known.

By putting things in a chronological order, individuals are able to keep things organized in a logical, systematic way. Those sections might include birth to school, elementary school years, middle school years, high school years, college, mission, courtship, family, career, and so on. Another idea would be to organize things by category.

Good writing starts with a plan or an outline.

After individuals have ideas of at least a few stories they want to tell, they can look at one of the titles they have saved and start writing from there.

Sometimes photos can spark an idea, as well as thinking of important dates and events. It is important to take it a piece at a time.

But what do I write about? Everyday things, 'ah-ha' moments, or special events, fun times, learning moments.

It is important to remember who will be reading the history you write. If it is for family, important family things should be included. If it is a public record, it is important to be wise in choosing what will be included in the history.

As ideas come, jot them down.

Consider the setting and where the story took place. Using interesting, descriptive, sensitive words brings the readers into the story and helps them to make a connection. Important to an individual's family history are the friends, family, co-workers, and others with whom they've had relationships.

As authors compile the stories and photos, they will be able to piece together a personal history.

Find a trusted partner who is willing to read what they have written before distributing the personal history. Sometimes it is difficult for the author to see spelling or grammatical errors, and someone with an outside view can give suggestions. Then, as the author shares the history with others, it will be more readable.

Family history is an important work that helps not only the person creating his or her own story but also his or her family and generations to come.

What Should Your Personal History Contain?

A few ideas for things to contain in your Personal History could include the following:

- Write about your name. Where did it come from? What does it mean?
- When and where were you born?
- Write about your mom and dad
- Write about your siblings?
- Where did you grow up? What do you remember from that place?
- (See Handout #3 for a more complete list)

Where Do I Begin?

List the major events along with the dates in your life. This is called a *timeline* and will get more detailed as you recall more events.

Then, to store information as you gather it, make a *filing system*—binders, manila folders, or index cards—divided into specific subjects or topics. The topics come from the areas of your timeline, such as *family background*, where you store information about your mother, father, brothers, sisters, grandparents, etc.; *youth, adolescence*, and so on. You might also want to use geographical divisions in your file system according to the various places you have lived and what happened to you there, or special *themes*, such as *school, work experiences, or influential people*. You'll want a special section for spiritual experiences. Each of your categories or topics can be the subject of a separate chapter in your life story.

How to Begin?

There is a simple way to begin keeping our records. If you don't know where to start, start with *yourself*. If you don't know what records to get, and how to get them, start with what *you've* got.

We can begin by gathering such materials as birth certificates; certificates of blessing, baptism, ordination, and graduation; diplomas; awards; photographs; and so on. Retain any written, registered, or recorded data pertaining to your life. Compile these items in boxes, folders, or files. Sort, divide, and assemble them into three major periods of your life: childhood, youth, and adulthood. After you have assembled these materials, you can begin to prepare your personal history.

A written record is not the only way to keep information. Family and personal histories can be recorded on audio recording devices. When preparing an oral recording, it is helpful to follow an outline and to keep events in chronological order.

To start, you might obtain a notebook and today write some of the things outlined in this lesson. If you have a personal computer, you could enter and store the information there. Date the entries and number the pages. Include the full names of people and places. Success comes with organizing your time, so set aside a regular time to write.

Start Writing

Do not be too critical of your writing skills. In the beginning, it is more important to get the information, stories, feelings, and events recorded first. Later, you can polish what you've written. These suggestions may help you begin your personal history:

- Begin your narrative at an exciting point in your life. You do not have to begin by listing your date of birth. Get your readers interested first, and then they will enjoy learning the facts later.
- Do not worry about style, grammar, punctuation, or other composition technicalities at the beginning. Write however feels most comfortable for you.
- Be visual with your words. Include background information about the location or local history at the time a memory or event took place. Describe clothing, rooms, expressions, and so on that were involved. Try to recapture the emotions of people. Give enough detail about the situation to make things interesting. Do not let your writing become just a list of dates and places with stories and a background to bring them to life.
- Be willing to laugh at yourself. Let your personality and humor shine through in your writing.
- Do not be afraid to write about your weaknesses, as well as your strengths. If you feel comfortable writing about mistakes you've made, elaborate on what you learned from them and what consequences followed.
- Always be truthful and honest about your life. If something is too uncomfortable to share, just exclude it and move on.
- Be wary of extremely sensitive issues, especially if other people were involved. It's important to be careful of libeling or embarrassing others.
- Remember your story doesn't have to be told in chronological order. Digress whenever you feel like; these digressions may just be the most interesting parts of your story.

Then What?

Add whatever finishing touches are most helpful—pictures, a title page, an introduction, appendixes at the end, if it's a written history; music, other voices, such everyday sounds as your doorbell, if it's recorded on an audio device.

What About Distributing It?

If it's written, you can get it printed—check around for price estimates—or you can photoduplicate it yourself. If it is an audio recording, you should store your original or master copy where they will not get lost or damaged. A back-up of the original is a good idea.

Review and Evaluate What You Have Written

Writing a first draft is only the beginning of your personal history process. Some of your best writing will happen as you review and revise what you've written. Take the time to rewrite sentences that don't work as well as you'd like them to. Getting a trusted friend, colleague, spouse, or family member to do the same will point out mistakes or confusions you may have skipped over. As you're reviewing, ask yourself and any others helping you the following questions:

- Does the reader feel involved and care about the outcome of the stories?
- Is your writing organized? Do the stories flow well? If not, how can they be improved – rearrangement, additional details, etc.?
- Do you have good sentence structure? Are any sentences too long or complicated, or do you have too many simple sentences?
- Are the identities of people in the stories clear? For example, if you have mentioned Grandma, have you elaborated on which grandma? Do you explain which aunt you're talking about when you say, "My aunt gave me my favorite Christmas gift that year"?
- Do any details or events need to be clarified or elaborated on?
- Have you included too much or overwhelming detail?
- Do the stories need to be shortened or lengthened to make them more enjoyable?
- Are there any spelling or other grammatical errors? These types of mistakes become more apparent when the text is read aloud.
- Do you use repetitive phrases or words often? For example, do too many sentences begin with, "I remember"?
- Are names, dates, places, and other details accurate?
- Have you used the proper tense throughout the entire history?

After the Review

You must decide what input and feedback is most valuable to revision. Sometimes a reviewer will express a concern that will indicate a problem besides the one mentioned. For example, a reviewer may say that a certain story is too long, but perhaps length is not the real issue. You may need to consider how to retell the story or describe events in another way.

Also, keep in mind if a reviewer makes a comment on a universal issue, for instance, using the proper tense or the same phrase within a certain area, it may apply to other areas within your history. Take the time to make sure the issue is addressed.

Now is also the time to decide where to insert photographs, letters, certificates, and other physical or visual documents.

Decide How You Want Your Finished History to Look

Play around with layout. It is a good time to review and adjust the appearance of your work. Consider line spacing, headings of chapters, and subheadings. You may decide to add or delete some of the design and layout elements as you work.

Some elements may be:

- Cover page
- Title page
- Preface (where you share your thoughts and feelings about your project)
- Table of contents
- Lists of photographs and illustrations
- Chronology (a quick and concise overview of your life in a page or two)
- Narrative
- Appendixes (family group sheets, pedigree charts, will extracts, handwriting samples, favorite recipes, and so on)
- Maps
- Index

Writing Challenges

If the writing process isn't going well, ask yourself why. Maybe you're writing about a subject you feel should be included but doesn't excite you. Think about whether it is really important or if you can just skip over it, even if just for the moment.

Realize that hard work is often necessary for inspiration. Self-discipline to write when you don't feel up to it may work but taking a few days' break may also. You can spend the time off from writing looking for photographs to include or revisiting a place you plan to talk about. Consider having an audio recording

device handy while you're doing these in case you remember more details. Activities related to your history may be enough to re-motivate you.

Sometimes the hardest part of writing is starting. If anything, write a single word. Then expand that word into a sentence. Expand that sentence into a paragraph. Once you've started writing, the process usually becomes easier and more enjoyable. When you need to take a break from writing, stop in the middle of an interesting story or paragraph. Then, when you return to your work, it will be easier for you to start again where you left off instead of wondering where to go next.

Another way is to start at the easiest part of your story or begin with a topic you really want to write about. If you find that you've come to a stump and simply cannot keep writing, consider recording your thoughts and memories and transcribing it later, adding in additional details.

Conclusion

Keeping records has always been important to all people. As we learn how and begin to record our personal and family histories, we can feel an increased respect and love for family members. As we write in our personal journals, we can record the important events of our lives that may have a positive influence on our children. A simple family record can influence our descendants for generations to come.



Questions, Answers and Comments



Note: Pass Out – Handout #2 – Resources for Information

Note: Pass Out – Handout #3 – Personal History Prompts/What to Write About

Note: Pass Out – Handout #4 – Expert Tips

Note: Pass Out – Handout #5 Writing Sample

Handout #1
It's All About Me – Information Worksheet

Name _____ Date _____

1. What is your name?
2. When and where were you born?
3. Who is your mother and father?
4. Who is your spouse?
5. Who are some of your other family members?
6. Who are some of your best friends?
7. Where did you grow up?
8. What did you do for a living?
9. What would you like people to remember about you?
10. What do you like most about life?
11. What are some of the toughest tests you have had in your life?
12. What are some of the most enjoyable things you have done in your life?
13. What is one of your greatest accomplishments in life?
14. What are some of the things you wish you would have done differently in your life?

Handout #2

Resources for information

Where does the material for a personal history come from? No less than eight types of sources can help you. Most of these items you could place in the right category in your file.

1. Diaries: Because life is usually long and detailed, a regularly kept diary is probably the most valuable single source of personal history. Write in a diary regularly, if not daily; write about your feelings, thoughts, observations; and use good quality paper with clear handwriting or typing.

2. Letters: Letters go two ways—to and from. Letters *to* you provide important information because the writers often respond to things you told them. *Letters from you can be rich sources, too, if you can track them down. If you do not make carbon copies of letters you send out, then you will need to contact recipients of your letters and arrange for photocopies or a loan of the originals.* Also, if you wrote a weekly letter to someone summarizing your week's activities, in time those letters would add up to a fine history.

3. Documents and artifacts: Papers and objects important to our lives deserve to be saved, such as birth, marriage, and missionary certificates, awards, report cards, and diplomas. Also include original drawings, paintings, poems, songs, and talks. More bulky but still important are artifacts of importance to you—tools, musical instruments, jewelry, hats—or products of your own talents or labors, such as carvings, sewn items, and handicrafts. Official records are also useful—government and Church records, newspapers, school yearbooks, organization minutes, and medical and legal records.

4. Photographs: Thanks to modern easy-to-use cameras, we now have scores of pictures of our children, compared to the skimpy handful of photos we are lucky to have of Grandmother's girlhood. We ought to use our cameras generously and then label each picture with name(s), place, and date. An annual family picture becomes a treasured record of physical change. Beyond just faces, pictures ought to capture typical work and play situations. How many of us really document our everyday experiences, such as pictures of our dentist, doctor, piano teacher, visiting teachers, home teaching partner, children in school, Father mowing the lawn, and Mother fixing dinner?

5. Tape recordings: Tape recorders, like cameras, are excellent resources for personal histories. You might record voices of children year by year, with a separate tape for each child to add to; dictated life stories—often easier than writing; taped oral history interviews of us or by us with relatives; talks; musical or dramatic performances; cassette letters to family members away from home; special home evenings.

6. Recollections of others: Written or tape recorded, other people's memories of us can provide a wealth of insight. People to contact: your parents, children, brothers and sisters,

teachers or students, employers, employees, neighbors, close personal friends, local Church leaders, visiting teaching partners, doctors, and former classmates or roommates.

7. Life sketches and autobiographies: It is sad that most people write only a brief ten- to fifteen-page life sketch as their record of a rich, full life, when in fact full chapters could be written or recorded about each stage of life—at least one chapter each on childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, prime adulthood, and later adulthood—and about special themes, such as parenting, work experiences, religious work, family roots and background, influential people, life philosophy, and humorous episodes.

8. Your memories: The most important source of all is your own memory. Think about who's in those fuzzy snapshots and why they're important. What do you remember about the place, the time? Jar your memory with other things: visit your old schools, listen to old records, see movies that were filmed about the years you grew up, brainstorm with brothers and sisters or old friends. While you ride the bus to work or mow the lawn, brainstorm using your own memory and seek to remember things related to one category of your filing system. You'll be surprised how it pays off.

What do you do with this material after you've collected it into your files?

Pick one of your files, organize all your notes in it, and write an outline of that part of your life. Using that outline, write a rough draft. Try to tell a lively story, expressing your *feelings* about what happened. Tell why and how, not just what happened. Your first draft will tell you where you need more information. Track it down and add it in. Let other people read the rough draft, listen to their reactions, then rewrite it. Do a third draft, if necessary.

Handout #3

Personal History Prompts/What to Write About

- Write about your name. Where did it come from? What does it mean?
- When and where were you born?
- Write about your mom and dad
- Write about your siblings?
- Where did you grow up? What do you remember from that place?
- Write about the house you grew up in.
- What was your childhood bedroom like?
- What was your favorite activity as a child?
- What was your favorite place as a child?
- Who were your friends as a child?
- Where did you travel as a child? What were your favorite places to visit?
- What was a typical day as a child?
- What was a typical day as a teen?
- What was high school like for you?
- What world events were significant to you as a child?
- Write about your grandparents
- Write about your aunts and uncles
- Write about your cousins
- Write about your early school memories
- What was your favorite subject in school?
- Who was your favorite teacher?
- Did you move as a child?
- Who taught you to drive?
- What is your favorite food?
- Write about your birthdays
- How did you typically celebrate your birthday?
- Write about your favorite holiday memory.
- What was the hardest part about growing up?
- What was the best part about growing up?
- When did you first leave home?
- What did your parents do for work?
- What was your first job?
- What is your favorite family story?
- Are there any funny stories that have been passed down through the generations? Write one of them.
- What were you most proud of as a child?
- What did you want to be/do when you grew up? Did you become or do it?
- Who inspired you as you matured?
- What job has been your favorite?
- What was the best part of your 20s?
- What was the best part of your 30s?
- Are you in a relationship? How did you meet your significant other?
- Did you have any boyfriends/girlfriends as a youth?
- Do you have kids? Write about them
- What are you most proud of as an adult?
- Where is the most fascinating place you've visited?
- What is one thing about today that you never want to forget?
- What items are on your bucket list?
- What advice would you give your younger self?
- A list, and details, of the ten most important things in your life now

- A health chronology if there are health issues that might affect your descendants
- Family traditions
- Romance
- Personal convictions and learning experiences
- Childhood memories
- Family members – Ancestors and descendants
- Funny or embarrassing experiences
- Society, geography, and entertainments surround you – anything that gives context to your life
- Examples of your talents (poems, artwork, songs, etc.)
- Challenges and how they shaped you
- Stories of your life experiences
- Stories or comments about you contributed to by other people
- Advice you'd like to share with future generations.
- Include and write about photographs of family, friends, homes, wedding day, yourself at milestone ages, a few vacation highlights, homes you have lived in, schools you attended, and so on
- Your feelings about social, religious, or personal issues
- Lessons you have learned
- Dreams for the future
- Excerpts from journals
- Poems you have written
- Newspaper articles about you or events you took part in
- Copies of certificates
- Direction from insightful inspirations
- Places you've lived
- Influential individuals from your past
- Favorite vacations
- Jobs you've had
- Thoughts on politics/Political views
- Religious views
- Top 5 favorite movies
- Civic and community service
- Things you like to collect
- Write about your spouse
- Your hopes and dreams and how they have changed over the years
- The automobiles you've had
- Places that you've visited and when
- Your favorite hobbies
- What do you like to shop for?
- Your impressions of the times, wars, developments, etc.
- Listing of certificates and accomplishments
- Favorite restaurants
- Favorite books and music
- Operations you've had
- The top 3 most difficult things you've ever done or had to go through
- Memberships in clubs or churches
- Gardens you've grown
- Favorite foods
- Games you like to play and why they're fun
- Favorite recipes
- Your favorite time of year
- Sports that you've played
- Pets you've had
- Weather phenomenon you've seen or experienced.
- Technological advances you've seen in your day
- Spiritual experiences you've had
- Favorite toys you've had
- Thoughts on raising children
- Education achieved
- Activities you've participated in
- Favorite book

Handout # 4

Expert Tips

#1 Expert Tip: Keeping a journal and a scrapbook together can help you create an excellent, full history of your life. Narratives and journal entries help provide insightful background to each photograph in your scrapbook.

#2 Expert Tip: If you plan to record your history electronically, be aware that electronic media does not retain quality for long. Electronic recordings should be transcribed onto archival quality paper. If it is digitized, it will last forever.

#3 Expert Tip: If you plan to create something to be printed and published formally, check with a few publishers. They will be able to tell you what you need to know to prepare your material for publication. This information could prevent the extra effort of retyping or reformatting your work later.

Expert Tip: If you are writing electronically, remember to save your work often. It would be frustrating and demotivating to lose all your progress and hard work to a computer glitch or failure.

#4 Expert Tip: Record your story on tape. Considering reading your story on tape and then listening to the recording. Do you feel that it is honest and worth listening to? Does it accurately represent your life?

Be careful when using information about living people. Be extremely sensitive to personal information, such as dates, sensitive issues, and contentious stories, of individuals who are still alive or who have living family members who may read your history. Never publish anything that you would not want to appear in tomorrow's newspaper. Also be cautious about including addresses and phone numbers.

#5 Expert Tips: Be generous with photographs. Most people look at photographs before reading text. Photos will create interest in reading accompanying text. Place photographs where they will be relevant within the writing.

#6 Expert Tip: Consider the layout of your history, such as the font, its size, and spacing, to make the text easy to read. If you plan on printing double-sided, be sure to leave margins on the binding side of each page wide enough to allow for binding. This is usually at least a quarter inch wider than the normal edge of a type-written page.

Handout # 5

Sample Writings

Excerpt from “Remembering... Thoughts and History of Scott F Teeples”

The Milk Man’s Son... and the other Children

When my son, Michael, was a freshman in high school at Mazama, he had an assignment in his Spanish class to do a large poster of his family tree including his parents and his other siblings. He placed a picture of Bonnie and I near the top and each of our children in a horizontal row below them. Below each picture he was to write something in Spanish about each person. We helped him find and print out some 5x7 pictures which he mounted on a large sheet of poster paper. Below each picture he wrote, in Spanish, the things he was supposed to write. He took it to school and turned it into his teacher.

Sometime later Michael was in my classroom at Mazama waiting for a ride home with me. He had the poster board with his family tree assignment. He had rolled it up and put it in the garbage can. I asked Michael why he was throwing it away and he said that he didn’t want it anymore. I told him that I would keep it. I mounted it on the wall above the chalkboard so that all my students could see it because I was proud of my family.

For years after that, I had students, and adults, come into my classroom and ask about the pictures of my wife and my family. I told them who each of them was and told them that I didn’t know what was written in Spanish.

Every once in a while, which was often, I would tell a little fib about our children. After telling them that that was me and the women next to me was my wife, I would tell them the names of each of the children. Then I would tell them a story (fib) about who the father of each child was. I told them that Ron’s father was the Milkman; Carrie’s father was the Mailman; Patti’s father was the Power Meter Reader; Robin’s father was the Cable Guy; Matt’s father was the Water Meter Reader; and that Mike’s father was the Paper Boy. Most people would look at me and know that I was teasing about their fathers because all my children look too much like me. But often, and usually a trusting and naïve freshman girl, would say something like “Mr. Teeples that is so terrible that your wife could do that to you.” I would always laugh and then tell them the truth.