



## Family History Library

# *Summer of Sleuthing—Saving Our Stories*

## **Adults' Family History Summer Challenges**

**SOS!** Your ancestors can be lost in time if you don't do something to ensure they are remembered. You can "throw them a line" by learning about them and their lives.

Writing your own story will also ensure that you are remembered and that your place in your family's collective memory is secure.

We hope that completing these challenges will help you develop a love of researching and writing personal and family histories and benefit you and your family. There are five challenges to choose from, each involving several tasks. You may want to make up a comparable challenge and do that instead of one that is listed.

**Regardless of the challenge you choose to complete, also do the following:**

If you already keep a journal, continue to write daily about what you are learning as you complete each challenge. If you don't keep a journal, keep one daily during the course of the Summer of Sleuthing Challenge.

**Choose one or two of these five challenges to complete. Each challenge has guidelines included in the packet.**

**A-1 Write your life story.** This may seem like a big task, but we will help you break it down into workable parts. You will be able to complete a history of your life that will be a treasure for you to give your children, grandchildren, and future generations.

**A-2 Research the life story of a chosen ancestor or an ancestral family.** Focusing on just one person and his or her family will give you good experience in researching and writing a personal history. You may want to continue from there and write a larger family history.

**A-3 Pick one portion of your family records and scrutinize it for errors and sources.** If your records are like those of a lot of people, they are incomplete and contain mistakes. For this challenge you will select a portion of your family records. Over the course of the next six weeks, try to find missing data and source documentation. The methods you learn and good practices you develop will help you to move on to other portions of your records so that you may complete and document them also.

**A-4 Create a descendancy family history.** You have likely seen a family history that contains information on all the descendants of a particular person or couple. In this challenge, you will learn how to do descendancy research. You will choose one of your ancestors and research his or her descendants.

**A-5 Scrapbook your family history.** If you have shoeboxes full of family pictures, then this may be the challenge for you. It's time to get those pictures organized, labeled, and documented. By the end of this challenge, you will have a lovely family history scrapbook to share with family members.

We hope you will:

- Enjoy completing these Summer of Sleuthing challenges.
- Gain knowledge and improved skills for doing and documenting research and for writing personal history.
- Come to love your ancestors as you get to know them better.
- Gain a desire to continue with similar projects in the future.



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# Guidelines

### A-1 Write Your Life Story

We have divided the life span into five categories:

1. Birth, parents, and siblings
2. Childhood memories, school years, and Scouting and youth group activities.
3. Religious, civic, or military service
4. Marriage and children
5. Employment and retirement

In each category, include:

- A historical time line of that period of your life (for help, see the attached handout on timelines in the Activities folder or see the Web site [ourtimelines.com](http://ourtimelines.com).)
- Specific dates and places.
- Your memories (or those of others) of key events in that period.
- What you learned from key events in that period.
- The names of people who influenced you during that period of your life.
- Vacations or special-event memories during that period.
- Your friends, associates, hobbies, and interests during that period.
- Pictures relative to that period of your life.

We have included a handout called Questions for a Life Story that is online in the Activities folder. We hope it will help trigger your memories. The questions are divided into categories, and you may use them as guidelines.

Choose one of the five categories to research and write about during each of the five weeks of the summer challenge. If you finish one category before the end of a week, start on the next category. Some categories may take more than one week to complete. The sixth week of your challenge will be spent compiling what you have gathered and putting the finishing touches on your life story.

### Take a class

If you live close to the Family History Library (FHL), you may have an opportunity to attend a class. Some of the family history centers (FHC) may also have a class schedule. There are also many offerings online. Make sure you also check with your local public library, your school district, and colleges or universities who may have class offerings.

### Conduct interviews

Research should include interviews with parents, siblings, other family members, and even friends, to obtain information from their perspective on events in your life. They may remember things you don't

remember or haven't considered. Record or make notes of these interviews to use later when you compile your story.

### **Locate newspaper accounts**

- Make a copy of the front page of a newspaper from your place of birth for the day you were born. Check your public library and local college or university library. If you were born outside of the area where you live, you may be able to order a copy of the newspaper through interlibrary loan. Some digital copies of newspapers may be available on the Internet. Do an online search for a newspaper for your town.
- Check the days following your birth to see if you can find a birth notice.
- Do the same for your marriage.
- If other events in your life have been reported in a newspaper, search for those notices too.

### **Copy documents**

- If you do not have copies of official documents of the events in your life, obtain copies. Include birth and marriage certificates as well as religious documents, such as a baptismal certificate, or other ordination certificates.
- Scan the documents, and store the images in your computer or on an external source, such as a CD or a flash drive. If you do not have a scanner at home, take the documents to a local facility, and use the equipment available there.

### **Select pictures**

Each week spend some time collecting, organizing, and selecting pictures to illustrate the periods of your life. Be selective; a few meaningful pictures are probably better than a lot of unimportant ones.

### **Finished product**

We have divided the average life span into five categories to assist you in collecting your thoughts and compiling information, but your finished product and narrative do not have to be in the same order. You can arrange your story in any way you choose.

Your finished life story can also take on a variety of forms:

1. A bound journal with a few inserted pictures and a handwritten narrative.
2. A scrapbook of pictures, documents, newspaper articles, etc., with a handwritten or typed narrative, giving the collective memories of the events depicted.
3. A desktop published history, including pictures, documents and newspaper articles, printed or burned to a CD.
4. A personal Web site or blog with the history and pictures that only selected individuals can access.

Whatever form you choose is up to you, but the challenge is to complete your life story over the summer. Once you have completed it, you should continue to keep a journal or in some way continue to document the events of your life so you can update your story periodically.

Consider sharing your story with family at a special occasion, such as a family reunion, a birthday, or Christmas. This may give you added incentive and help you decide the final form of your story. Remember to keep a journal of your progress, your experiences, and your feelings about completing this challenge.



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## A-2 Research the Life of a Chosen Ancestor or an Ancestral Family

Here is a week-by-week list of tasks for you to do to research the life of your ancestor and prepare to write his or her life story. Some of these may not apply to your project. Complete every task that does apply. Remember to keep a journal of your progress, your experiences, and your feelings about completing this challenge.

### Week 1

1. Complete at least a four-generation pedigree chart of your family with your name as number one. Make this a five-generation pedigree chart if two or more of your grandparents were born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You may do this task and the next on the computer using a genealogy program like Personal Ancestral File (PAF). (PAF is available to download free of charge at the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org).)
2. Complete a family group record for each family represented on your pedigree chart. If someone in your family already has family group records for your families, you may make copies of theirs. You may also make copies from genealogy databases on the Internet, such as those found at the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org).
3. Select an ancestor or a family from your chart (one who is now deceased and who was born before 1908) that you would like to learn more about. It does not have to be a direct-line ancestor.
4. File your charts and records in a sturdy folder or binder or in your computer.
5. Create a time line of your ancestor's or family's life, and add to it as you progress with your research.

### Week 2

1. If you have living relatives who would have known about your ancestor, interview them. Write down a list of questions before the interview. You may want to make an audio recording of the answers and comments. Interview more than one relative if possible.
2. Use the online handout in the Activities folder Questions for a Life Story. The questions are divided into categories. You may not be able to get answers to all of the questions, but using them as a guide will help as you write about your ancestor's life.
3. Search for additional information through the personal diaries or journals of your ancestor. Obtain copies of those writings.

4. Look for compiled family histories. A compiled family history is one that has been researched by someone else and compiled or published into a book or a searchable computer database. Published histories are listed in the Family History Library Catalog, which is available online at the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org). Also look for other online databases containing compiled family histories. Do any of these compiled sources contain more information than you already had?
5. Keep a research log. Research logs are available at the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org). (On the home page, under Start Your Family History, click on the link for forms. From the list, select **Research Log**.) A research log is a form for keeping track of the records you have searched. Record both your positive and negative searches, keeping careful notes. As you progress with your research, print copies of documents you find, number them and note them on your research log, and then file them in your folder or binder or in your computer files. To avoid punching holes in document copies, use archival sheet protectors.
6. Look for class offerings at your local community center, the public library, or college or university.

### Week 3

1. Newspapers are a great source of information about everyday life. Choose dates of key events in your ancestor's life, such as birth, marriage, or death, and see if you can find information relating to your ancestor through newspapers. Find out what was going on in his or her community at the time. Many newspapers are available online or through interlibrary loan. Add new information to your notes, and record the source on your research log.
2. Find your ancestor in census records for every available census during his or her lifetime. Censuses have been taken in the U.S. every 10 years since 1790, and those through 1930 are available to the public. Most local libraries have access to the Web site [heritagequestonline.com](http://heritagequestonline.com), and it is available at home using your library card. Make copies or digitally save copies of the census entries, note them on your research log, and file them in your folder. If you need census records for other countries, explore the internet.
3. Search for published town or county histories online or through local repositories. What was occurring in the town, county, state, or country that would have affected your ancestor's life? Does the history contain biographical information on your ancestor? If your ancestor moved around, check for histories of the different places where he or she lived. Add information to your notes and new sources to your research log.

### Week 4

Find your ancestor or family members in other official records available for their locality and time period. These can include vital records, church records, court records, land records, military records, probate records, and tax records. Make copies of the records, note them on your research log, and file them in your folder. Organize your folder as your collection grows.

### Week 5

1. Continue to work on any unfinished tasks from a previous week.
2. Using the time line you created of your ancestor's life, write an outline to follow as you write about his or her life.

3. Look at all the information you collected on your ancestor, and decide how and where it will fit into your outline and history.

## **Week 6**

Following your outline and incorporating information from the sources you found, write a brief history of your ancestor's life. Make copies of the history to distribute to family members.



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### **A-3 Pick one portion of your family records and scrutinize it for errors and sources**

If your records are like those of a lot of people, they are missing important information. There may be missing names, incomplete dates and places, and inadequate documentation. Every name, date, and place should be as complete as possible and should be documented with at least one reliable source, including access information so it can be found again. Make sure you have at least one source for every piece of information you have.

Remember to keep a journal of your progress, your experiences, and your feelings about completing this challenge.

#### **Week 1**

1. Select a family on your pedigree chart whose records you would like to complete and document. Study what you have on that family, and look for missing data or source documentation. You may wish to make working copies of your records so you can write on them as you progress.
2. Create a “to do” list, noting each item you want to find or document.
3. Contact family members, and ask them if they have data or sources you do not. If they are able to supply needed information and sources, add them to your records and check those items off of your “to do” list. You may wish to also obtain copies of the sources, such as birth or death certificates.

#### **Week 2**

1. Continue contacting family members. One contact may lead you to another.
2. Organize your information and records as you collect them. Keep paper copies in a folder, and record data on forms or use a genealogy software program, such as Personal Ancestral File (PAF), to organize your family data and sources. (This program can be downloaded free of charge from the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org).)

#### **Week 3**

1. To document pieces of information, such as a birth date or place, you may need to look at records kept by governments, churches, or private organizations. Several types of records exist for any country, and they are often indexed. Many records and indexes may be available online. Types of records may include:



- a) Census records—taken by the government, listing the entire family and giving personal details including where they were living.
  - b) Vital records—government records of births, marriages, and deaths.
  - c) Church records—baptism, marriage, burial, and membership records.
  - d) Cemetery records—registers in churches and the inscriptions on gravestones.
  - e) Probate records—wills naming family relationships.
  - f) Newspaper obituaries—in newspapers and local histories.
  - g) Land records—taxes, deeds, and other business transactions recorded locally.
2. Keep a research log of the sources you have searched and the information you have found. You can print research logs from the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) (Click on the **Home Page**. Under the Start Your Family History tab, click on the link for **Forms**. From the list, select **Research Log**). Make copies of the records you find, and file them in your folder. Add new information to your forms or genealogy program.

#### **Week 4**

Continue working on the tasks from the previous weeks.

#### **Weeks 5 and 6**

1. When you have finished this challenge, share newly completed and documented information with family members. This can be done with either paper copies, digital copies burned to CDs, or a family Web site or blog.
2. Write in your journal about what you have accomplished during the challenge. When this challenge is completed, you are ready to move on to another family on your pedigree whose information needs to be completed and documented.



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### A-4 Create a Descendancy Family History

This challenge is about doing descendancy research which is researching all of the descendants of a chosen ancestor down the family tree. Ancestry research follows direct lines backward, or up the tree, and usually does not branch out to collateral lines (the families of the brothers and sisters of your direct ancestors).

Remember to keep a journal of your progress, your experiences, and your feelings about completing this challenge.

#### Week 1

1. Select an ancestor for whom you would like to find all the descendants. For this challenge, we suggest you choose an ancestor born after 1830.
2. Create a family group record for that ancestor and his or her immediate family.
3. Create a family group record for each child of that ancestor, with that child as a parent, along with the spouse and children. Continue this exercise with each generation as you progress down the tree.
4. Look for gaps in your records. Are there gaps in family dates? Are there too many years between children? Perhaps some children are missing. Make note of information you need to find or verify.
5. Inform extended family members of what you are doing, and solicit their help in identifying the children of each generation of descendants and who they married.
6. Go online to the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org), and search for your ancestor and the names of his or her children, grandchildren, and other descendants. Make copies, and add the new information to your records. Search other Web sites where contacts share pedigree records.

#### Week 2

Organize your records as you collect them. Keep paper copies in a folder, and record data on forms or use a genealogy software program, such as Personal Ancestral File (PAF), to organize your family data and sources. (This program can be downloaded free of charge from the Web site [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org).)

**Weeks 3-5**

Continue working on your tasks.

**Week 6**

1. Finish working on your tasks.
2. Make copies of your completed descendency record, and share them with your family members.

When this challenge is complete, you may want to undertake a descendency record for one of your other ancestors.



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## A-5 Scrapbook Your Family History

Scrapbooking is a popular pastime and there are great materials available to help you create a heritage scrapbook that will be a lasting treasure for you and your family for generations

### Week 1

1. Collect your loose family pictures, documents, and other memorabilia in one location for sorting. You may also want to include pictures from photo albums, if they can be removed without damage.
2. Sort your family pictures, documents, and memorabilia. Here are some possible sorting options:
  - a) Sort by family.
  - b) Sort in chronological order.
  - c) Sort by special events, such as holidays, family events, or memorable vacations.
3. Talk to family members and tell them what you are doing. They may be able to provide pictures as well as background information and stories to go along with them.

### Week 2

1. Decide on a size and format for your heritage scrapbook.
  - a) Two of the most popular sizes are 8" x 10" and 12" x 12". Keep in mind that you will be scanning or color copying the pages of your scrapbook to give to family members, so you may want to choose a size convenient for this.
  - b) You may use scrapbooks that are already bound, or you may want to use three-ring binders.
  - c) Make sure all your materials, including a binder, papers, pens, stickers, ink, and adhesives are acid free.
2. Decide on a theme for your scrapbook. Here are some suggestions:
  - a) Family reunions through the years.
  - b) Family holidays or vacations through the years.
  - c) A tribute to family members who have served in the military.
  - d) The life of a particular person, family, or branch of the family.
  - e) Life on the old family farm.
3. If necessary, sort your pictures, documents and memorabilia based on your theme.

### **Week 3**

1. Begin to plan the layout of the pages of your heritage scrapbook.
  - a) Group pictures, documents, memorabilia, and stories that go together.
  - b) Do not overload the pages. Three or four pictures or items per page are enough. You want to leave room for the stories and identification that goes with them.
  - c) Decide on a color scheme for the pages. You could choose one to match your theme or complement the pictures. Make a list of supplies you will need for each page before you go to the store.
  - d) You may want to make rough sketches of the layouts of each page to follow when you are actually putting them together. These will help assembly go more quickly.
2. As you select pictures to go on your pages, choose the best ones, and set aside those you will not be using—especially if there are similar pictures taken at the same time. Duplicates or pictures of lesser quality can be thrown away or passed on to family members who may want them. Some may also be saved for another heritage scrapbook. You could put copies of a family picture into a scrapbook for each person in the picture.

### **Weeks 4 and 5**

1. With your list in hand, go to a store that sells scrapbooking supplies, and buy the supplies you need. Make sure all your supplies are acid free.
2. Following your layouts, begin putting your pages together.

### **Week 6**

1. When you have finished assembling your pages, either scan them and print them in color, or take them to a photocopy center and make color copies of them.
2. Slip each page, into an archive-safe clear page protector. Assemble your covered pages into your selected binders for distribution to your family members. You may want to distribute them at a special occasion, such as a family birthday, an anniversary, a reunion, or Christmas.