

GETTING STARTED WITH GENEALOGY

INTERVIEWING FAMILY

There is information about your family at your fingertips. Look in your home for birth and other vital records, pictures, letters and so forth. You can also ask your relatives if they have any documents that might be useful to you. See if you can scan, copy or get a picture of anything they have. These papers will expand your understanding of your family. Record any information you find in your genealogy software.

Another source for genealogical information are oral histories. These are recorded interviews that you create.

First you will need to create an interview plan. Who do you want to talk to? What do you want to know? How will you record the interview?

Interviewees

Some people will not wish to talk or be recorded and honor their wishes. Some will be happy and proud you are taking an interest. If possible, you'll want to interview the older members of your family first. Don't forget to talk to aunts, uncles, siblings and cousins; they might know things that you don't.

Interview only one person at a time. Multiple people's voices on a recording are difficult to decipher. There may be interruptions or disagreements that won't record well.

Questions

You'll be trying to fill in blanks in your ancestral chart as well as trying to find out about the lives of the people you are interviewing. You can use old photos or documents (like birth, marriage and death records or anything else of interest) to provide talking points.

In addition, make a list of open-ended questions as places to start. However, you will want to allow a natural conversation to take place. Make notes if you want to come back to something if the conversation is flowing. When there is a natural pause, you can go back to your notes or ask a question.

Open ended questions do not have simple one or two word answers. "How old were you when your brother Johnnie was born?" is not open ended. "What was it like for you when your brother Johnnie was born?" Is an open ended question. Use the Resources below for some possible open ended questions.

Recording

Record or video your interview. You can easily record the interview with a phone, tablet, computer or recording device. You can use Skype, Zoom or another app to record an interview with someone farther away.

For each interview, you should state your name, the other person's name and the date at the beginning. Interviews should last no longer than two hours. If your interviewee is getting tired, it's a good time to stop, even if the time limit has not been reached. You can always interview again in the future.

Resources

Here are some resources for suggested questions and interview techniques:

- [150 Questions to Ask Family Members About Their Lives](#) from Deseret News.
- [Conducting an Oral History](#) from the York Region District School Board Museum & Archives.
- [Conducting Oral Histories with Family Members](#) from UCLA.
- [Creating Oral Histories](#) from FamilySearch.org.
- [Fifty Questions to Ask Relatives About Family History](#) from Thoughtco.com.

- *The Family Tree Toolkit* by Kenyatta D. Berry, pages 3-4.
- *Genealogy for Dummies* by Matthew L. Helm and April Leigh Helm, pages 40-43.