

Diaries/Journals/Letters of our Ancestors: A Window to Better Research and Writing Family Histories

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Diaries/Journals/Letters of our Ancestors: A Window to Better Research and Writing Family Histories

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Course Description: Written ancestors' diaries, journals, and letters provide a window into their lives and private moments. Learn how to review and use information from ancestors' writings in conducting genealogical research and writing family histories. Also learn ten ways to improve the journals you keep of your life.

Writings of ancestors as an historical source

In reviewing the writings of my ancestors whether its letters, journals, postcards, notes, or email I have found:

1. Dates and places of events and experiences important in the life of the writer
2. Details of day-to-day life
3. Personal opinions and perspectives
4. Concerns and priorities
5. Thoughts and feelings
6. Hopes and dreams
7. Facts and dates about relatives and neighbors
8. Interesting views of historical happenings that were current events to them (e.g., wars, elections, epidemics, etc.)
9. Background information about living conditions, prices, etc.

The writings can be lively and full of energy, some fresh and intimate, some dull and non-descriptive and most plain-spoken, simply sharing a moment in time, putting to paper something they felt needed to be said. I've found the documents in a myriad of places, such as:

1. Attics, closets, basements, bookshelves, etc.
2. In the homes of your known relatives
3. In the possession of distant cousins located through research
4. In libraries, archives, genealogical and historical societies, and other specialized collections
5. In antique shops, used book stores and flea markets, especially near the residence of the subject
6. Through websites designed to reunite diaries, photos, Bibles and other memorabilia with the families from which they were separated

I have used the information to:

1. Find dates of life events to further research
2. Find names of family members, neighbors and others who interacted with the family
3. Gain insight into the personality of the ancestor
4. Put the ancestor's life into context time- and history-wise
5. Pull interesting details or excerpts for a family or personal history I am writing
6. Find clues of medical conditions that may continue to affect family today

Defining the written word of our ancestors.

During my time as a genealogist, I have had the fortune to come across several artifacts from my ancestors, among which include the letters and cards of my mother, journals and poetry of my father and a myriad of bits and pieces shared by others that together begin to tell a story of life that isn't so much different from my own. Before we progress too far, I would like to take a few lines and outline some of the differences you will find in written communications.

Letter

1. A direct, written message that is usually sent some distance from one person to another, or even to a group of persons or an organization.
2. Some of the earliest recorded letters were written about 3500 BC by the Sumerians using picture writing who wrote on clay tablets using long reeds.
3. An old term for letter is "epistle," from the Greek word epistole, meaning "message." Letters make up several of the books of the Bible.
4. Engages a dialogue between parties.
5. Often became objects to represent the absent person's touch and nearness. Nathaniel Hawthorne became a famous author, but he spoke like countless other correspondents when he wrote to his sweetheart Sophia Peabody in 1840 that

"The only ray of light" in his dreary day "was when [I] opened thy letter....I have folded it to my heart, and ever and anon it sends a thrill through me....It seems as if thy head were leaning against my breast."

6. You find letters scattered about and must be gathered to form a collection of writings.
7. Nowadays, letters are only widely used by companies who send out letters to large numbers of people, who may not have access to the internet for e-mail.
8. Sometimes used for e-mail messages with a formal letter-like format.

Journals and Diaries

In 1656, John Beadle, an Essex minister, wrote an advice manual on how to keep a diary and explained the variety of types that were written in the seventeenth century:

'We have our state journals, relating to national affairs. Tradesmen keep their shop books. Merchants their account books. Lawyers have their books of precedents. Physicians have their experiments. Some wary husbands have kept a diary of daily disbursements. Travellers a Journall of all that they have seen and hath befallen them in their way. A Christian that would be more exact hath more need and may reap much more good by such a journal as this. We are all but stewards, factors here, and must give a strict account in that great day to the high Lord of all our wayes, and of all his wayes towards us.'

Journals and Diaries are used interchangeably today. No matter what you call them, these accounts are the autobiographies of ordinary people like your ancestors, and these may be the only existing records of their personal lives. Along with genealogical data, diaries give you a wonderful glimpse into someone's daily life, thoughts, and attitudes. A diarist may also record feelings on national events, such as a war or its impact on family, and the community. The following is an attempt to define meanings as used over the last several centuries.

Diaries (The Private Journal)

1. Some use the words "diary" and "journal" interchangeably while others apply strict differences to journals, diaries and journaling: dated, undated, inner focused, outer focused, forced, etc.
2. Diary is referred to as a private journal.
3. The current preference (based on book and article titles) is to use the word "journal." The phrase "journaling" is often used to describe such hobby writing, similar to the term "scrap booking."
4. Relatively recent from the 1700's in the culture of Western Europe and early America.
5. Popularity of diaries stem from the rising as part of the Christian desire to chart the individuals spiritual progression toward God.
6. Expanded in the 1800's to record personal feelings, self-discovery, and self-reflection.
7. Diaries are found in all aspects of human life, governmental, business ledgers, and military records. Diaries run the spectrum from business notations, to listings of weather and daily personal events, to inner exploration of the psyche, or a place to express one's deepest self.
8. Written to oneself or an imaginary person. May resemble like a letter to ones' self.
9. There is a strong psychological effect of having an audience for one's self-expression, a personal space, or a "listener," even if this is the book one writes in, only read by oneself.
10. Some diarists think of their diaries as a special friend, even going so far as to name them. For example, Anne Frank called her diary "Kitty."
11. Woven together usually by a single individual between covers.
12. A well known example is "The Diary of Anne Frank," whose diary chronicled the desperation of being Jewish in Amsterdam during World War II and having to go into hiding from the Nazis. The diary is, first, a day by day account of life of a Jewish family and their friends. Second, it is a biting commentary of the depths of suffering that men can impose on other men. A stunning web site about this child and her story is at <http://www.annefrank.com/>.

Journal (Public Record)

1. A journal (French from late Latin diurnalis, daily) has several related meanings:

- a. A daily record of events or business; a private journal is usually referred to as a diary. For example:
 - b. A newspaper or other periodical, in the literal sense of one published each day; however, some publications issued at stated intervals, such as a magazine or the record of the transactions of society such as a scientific journal or academic journals in general, are called a journal. Journal, then, is sometimes used as a synonym for "magazine."
 - c. The word "journalist" for one whose business is writing for the public press has been in use since the end of the 17th century.
2. Section 5 of Article I of the United States Constitution requires the Congress of the United States to keep a journal of its proceedings. This journal, the Congressional Record is published by the Government Printing Office. Journals of this sort are also often referred to as minutes.
 3. A book in which an account of transactions is kept previous to a transfer to the ledger in the process of bookkeeping. For example:
 - a. A central book in which all financial transactions were recorded. These include the purchase of supplies, the sale of crops, the purchase and sale of livestock, and the purchase, sale, birth, marriage and death of slaves, apprentices and other servants;
 - b. The record of all agricultural activities from year to year, including the purchase of seed, fertilizer, cordage and wire, plows and other equipment, cost of labor, places of sale, transportation costs, and the prices obtained for the crops; or
 - c. A chronicle of life on the farm, including some or all of the above. Journals can provide essential clues to African-American genealogists researching their slave ancestors. Plantation records may be the only place to ascertain names and dates necessary to prove ancestral ties.
 4. An equivalent to a ship's log, as a record of the daily run, such as observations, weather changes, or other events of daily importance.

Post Card

1. Typically a rectangular piece of thick paper or thin cardboard intended for writing and mailing without an envelope and at a lower rate than a letter.
2. The United States Postal Service began issuing pre-stamped postal cards in 1873.
3. The postal cards came about because the public was looking for an easier way to send quick notes.
4. Very popular in the early 1900's. For example, in 1908, more than 677 million postcards were mailed.
5. The messages contained in postcards are necessarily brief and generally lighthearted as the sender is normally on holidays and switched off from the day to day routines of home and work.
6. Mostly the sender confines himself to the brevity that the form imposes and the message is cheerful and upbeat.

Greeting Cards

1. A greeting card is an illustrated, folded card usually featuring a message of greeting or other sentiment.
2. The oldest known greeting card in existence is a Valentine made in the 1400's and is in the British Museum. New Year's cards can be dated back to this period as well, but the New Year greeting didn't gain popularity until the late 1700's.
3. Cards gained their highest popularity in the late 1800's and early 1900's offering us cards with some of the most unusual art.
4. 90% of all paper greeting cards are sold in the United States.
5. Greeting cards are usually given on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas or other holidays.
6. Also sent on 'non-occasions' to say 'hello' or 'thank you'.
7. Greeting cards, usually packaged with an envelope, come in a variety of styles, are manufactured and/or hand-made by hundreds of companies big and small.
8. Token of affection that articulates the form of love and affiliation of a given time period.
9. Card inscriptions can be a window of how an ancestor felt about the recipient.
10. The messages in greeting cards are usually brief.
11. Mostly the sender confines himself to the brevity that the form imposes and the message is cheerful and upbeat.

Written Notes/Message

1. Ranges from a piece of paper tucked into a journal as a personal reminder or in the margins of a letter denoting an extra add-on thought.
2. Can provide insight and extra meaning to what has already been written.

Email

1. Electronic mail, abbreviated e-mail or email, is a method of composing, sending, storing, and receiving messages over electronic communication systems.
2. E-mail started in 1965 as a way for multiple users of a time-sharing mainframe computer to communicate.

Blog (Weblog)

A weblog, which is usually shortened to blog, is a website where regular entries are made (such as in a journal or diary) and presented in reverse chronological order. Blogs often offer commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic.

Before You Start your Review

Whether you are reviewing a private collection handed down from mom or one you find in university archives, the following are a few questions to consider:

1. Ask, is this volume the complete diary or are there other volumes or entries elsewhere?
2. Is this letter a draft or "practice" letter, or is it the one actually mailed?
3. Who saved the diary and why?
4. Who collected the letters and why?
5. Is there evidence of other readers (family members, archivists) handling or marking the text?
6. Has the diarist herself added retrospective marginal notes (many diarists look back and criticize their younger selves or annotate their observations), scratched out passages or cut out pages?
7. What is the period of time covered by the text? It helps you to plan your reading to quickly scan the pages ahead to see if the number of diary entries or letters changes because of major historical events.
8. Does the diarist clearly distinguish one day from another?
9. How frequent are the entries? In one family collection I found several hundred post cards that covered 30 years of time between family and friends. While in another I found 300 separate journal entries in six months during the waning months of an individual's life.
10. It is worth a quick look ahead, too, to see if one correspondent's letters dominate the collection, or if the letters are more like a dialogue or even a full conversation among many people.
11. Check out event changes such as the place from which the communication was written. Often a writer will indicate from whence they are writing, (Munich, Germany) or (Lawrenceville, Georgia).
12. Look through the collection to see if there are indications of important events. For instance, during the 19th century deaths often were written on black-edged paper; letters announcing a marriage tend to be embossed or differently sized – both easy to spot in a sheaf of papers.

Strategies for Interpretation of Writings

Whether you are reviewing a letter, journal, postcard or other writing of an ancestor, there are several strategies for evaluating and gaining the most from the “total presentation.” No only are you looking at the written word, but you are looking at paper, images, and handwriting. All provide clues and information about your ancestor. The following represent different angles from which to view the writings of your ancestors.

1. Impressions by look and feel. As you hold the writings in your hands, they make an impression before you even read the words by the texture, condition, paper type, style of writing which suggest the writer’s care or haste, depth, and surface and by the care of the folded sheets of a letter or the binding of the diary, and time between inscriptions. One begins to raise questions such as social class:

1. Is the paper the ordinary lined, “blue” sheets of common mid-nineteenth century use or is it embossed and edged?
2. Women and men were schooled to have very different handwriting.
3. Presents absence of an array of nibs (the sharpened point of a quill pen; a pen point), papers, envelopes, letter cases, letter clips, writing desks, and other objects associated with writing among well-to-do Americans of the era.

2. Think in terms of plot, characters, and language of the script. Think of the last article, story, or even movie you watched. Who was the main character and subordinate characters? What was the plot? How was the script written? As you review writings, you gain a feel for the individuals involved, their role, and the events of the plot.

1. **Becoming acquainted with the characters.** In the diary, we depend upon the writer to introduce us to the individuals in their life. Sometimes persons are named, other times we are left to figure them out for ourselves. When it comes to letters, the introductions to characters are hit and miss. The writer wasn’t writing to us, but usually to one who knew them.

Try to understand who the friends and family members where, especially if you are using unedited communications. Some family rarely uses given names in correspondence. In such cases start out slow until you are able to determine the identity of “Dear Son” or “Your loving Daughter” The same holds true for nicknames. I know during my father’s years as a youth (1930s and 40) it was common to have nicknames, Frip, Jiggs, and Stu.

2. **What inspired the plot?** As you survey the writing, think about whether a particular circumstance inspired the writing. Is there a large-scale “story” holding the writings together. We find this type of inspiration in writings during the period of war or changes in one’s life. In other cases, diaries and especially letters are focused on ordinariness of the writer’s life. In either case, though,

surveying the text for a sense of the main narrative thread is a good way to prompt questions about the text as you begin to read more closely.

3. **Look for unique language.** Think about your use of instant messaging. In our writing we use words, phrases, and acronyms, to help us communicate faster. For example, TTYL (Talk to you later), :-> Smile, K (OK), TY (Thank you), Dido (I agree). Just like us, our ancestors also had interjections into their correspondence that stood for something else. For instance, many modern readers are puzzled by some correspondents' interjection of "D.V." in the midst of certain sentences expressing hope ("by now, D.V., you are safely at home") when these letters are not the recipient's initials. Then, finally, one writer solves the puzzle for us by spelling it out: *Deo Volente*, God willing.

Such puzzles will help you to be alert to the fact that the meaning of certain words or phrases is coded (to say in the mid-nineteenth-century that a woman had "taken a cold" almost always meant that she was pregnant).

4. **How does the writer relate the experiences of their life?** Personal texts are usually begun by the accounts of key events that occur over time and are important enough to write about, such as a death, a child leaving home, a marriage, a natural disaster, work, and so forth.

The story of events also reveals the interrelationships of the writers, friends, family, acquaintances, and strangers. The relationships shape our understanding of how the writer fits into the events and through which eye we see the interpretation of what is written.

Most letters are written by "news" or are rich with events which the writer tries to describe in detail. You may see how the writer describes (filters) the same event/news to different people in his life. For example, an experience about crossing a river and almost drowning may be written in full detail for a friend and to a mother the description may be only that the writer became wet when crossing a river.

In letters you will find other parties sensitive to the absence of one another. Some, however, focus on the distance apart, while other letters focus on bringing one closer together such as in the case of lovers or parents, and children blaming each other for neglect, or praising each other for timely and satisfying letters.

3. Questions to ask as you review writings. When reviewing writings of ancestors, don't conduct an in-depth analysis of every word, sentence and meaning for every artifact. Do examine the artifacts by carefully identifying and analyzing the item. Then, reflect on what you've learned.

1. Identify. Ask yourself about the primary source itself.

1. What is the item?
2. Who created it?
3. Where and when was it created?
4. What's the history of the item?

2. Analysis. Ask yourself the following questions about the primary source.

1. Creator

- a. Who created the primary source and why?
- b. What was this person's role in the event, time period, or activity?
- c. What was the person's perspective, point of view, opinions, interests, or motivation? How did this impact the content?
- d. What was the purpose for creating the source?
- e. Was the source intended to be public or private?
- f. Was the intention of the creator to inform, instruct, persuade, or deceive? How did this impact the content?
- g. Which events – trivial or monumental – do ancestors choose to share with each other?
- h. Are any events or topics ignored or skirted?
- i. Who among the correspondents seem the most intimate and who seem most at odds?
- j. How does each writer seem to value formal respect and careful language, on the one hand, and humor, exaggeration, and slang, on the other?
- k. Does one individual seem to be the central person in the correspondence, and, conversely, is there an individual everyone seems to regard as shy or silent?
- l. Which relationships seem most stable over the course of the correspondence, which most volatile, and how do events in their lives reveal these qualities?
- m. How do all of these relate to the identities of the various correspondents, in terms of gender, class, age?

2. Timing

- a. Was the item created before, during, or after an event?
- b. How might the timing of the creation impact the emotions, accuracy, or perspective?

3. Setting

- a. What is the setting of the primary source? Where was it created?
- b. What were the conditions or circumstances related to the creation?
- c. What information (i.e., facts & opinions) does the primary source contain?
- d. What details could easily be misunderstood?
- e. How does this resource compare to other information from the event or time period?

4. Visual Information

- a. What story does the image tell?
- b. What is the perspective or point of view of the image?
- c. What is the setting of the image?
- d. What details are emphasized or missing?

5. Just for the Diary and Journal

- a. Who is the “other” the diarist seems to be writing to: a friend, a wiser self, a future self?
- b. What other literary forms does a given diary most resemble, e.g., a letter, a novel, a ledger?
- c. What kinds of events, times of the day or week, and emotional state seem to motivate the diarist to write?
- d. Does the diarist always write in the first person or does he sometimes distance himself by avoiding the “I”?
- e. Which people in the diarist’s life appear most frequently in their pages, and why?
- f. Do any or all of these features of a given diary change over its course, and if so, in what way?

3. Reflection upon findings

Ask yourself the following questions about your findings.

- g. What information was fascinating or surprising? What would be interesting to investigate further?
- h. What questions do you have about the information? How could they be addressed?
- i. What inconsistencies or conflicting ideas did you identify? How could they be resolved?
- j. How does this document connect to your life? What are the relevant issues for today?

4. Expanding upon the writings of your ancestors. Writers will often make assertions about a fact that was important to them. For example: A correspondent mentions the death of a loved one due to the flu epidemic in 1917. It might be important for you to consult other sources which describe the extent of the flu in that town, state, country. Or, if a diarist makes a claim about a visit of President Kennedy on January 15, 1961, one could consult — official documents, newspapers, other observers — to give perspective to what the diarist says.

Depending upon how wide you want to take your study, you can include many sources such as census reports, government documents, photographs, maps, oral histories — and other diaries and letters. For example, I read in journals and histories that my ancestors were cattle ranchers in Utah County, Utah. I am from the city and have no clue about cattle ranching. I took the opportunity to find newspaper articles about ranching in Utah. I checked the Utah State department of brands to find if they had a brand. I looked for photos of the early 1900’s of cattle ranching in Utah, and really anything I could find that would help me understand this profession as it related to Utah ranchers. Now as I write

about my great grandfather, I can better explain and provide details about what their lives as ranchers might have been like, the jobs they performed, trials they endured and the satisfaction they may have felt.

The following are other ideas to use:

1. **Chronology.** Build a timeline associated with the item. In addition, create a parallel timeline that relates to local, national, and international events. Also, consider tracing the genealogy of the families associated with the item. Use this chronology to help develop an understanding of the time period.
2. **Maps.** Explore the locations discussed in the document. Consider visually tracing adventures and activities. Use maps to help develop a context for the place associated with your project.
3. **Relationships.** Explore the relationships among the people represented in the document.
4. **Visual Resources.** Match visuals such as photographs to people, places, and events in the document.
5. **Multimedia Resources.** Consider connecting the arts, books, music, movies and other activities to the resource.

A couple of things happen when you seek to corroborate and add context to the story. You expand the “what happened” and have a greater ability to interpret what you are reading from their viewpoint. You also gain a sense of how accurate the writer was in interpreting their times as an actor and observer.

5. Simplifying the Analysis of Ancestor’s Writings

It’s a great opportunity to evaluate and try to “become acquainted” with ancestors through their writings. Some genealogists want⁴ to find the facts and not spend much time on analysis. The following is a simplified 1, 2, 3 step for reviewing an ancestor’s writings. Ask the following questions:

1. Identify factual information (how is the writing, about what, and where).
2. Who are the main characters described in the letter?
3. What is the plot of the letter?
4. What questions do you have about the artifact? Include words you can’t decode or understand.
5. What research would you need to do to widen your understanding of the letter?

Getting Access to Ancestor's Writings in the Possession of Others

These journals, letters, and writings of our ancestors are very precious to those who own them. The owner's response to give you access to them depends a lot on how well you know each other. If they know and trust you they may allow you to take the documents on loan for a specific time period, usually 24 to 48 hours to scan and/or photograph the article.

In cases where information is a little more difficult to secure, consider the following approaches:

1. **The insurance copy argument.** If they have the original item, remind them that it could be lost or gone forever in a house fire or other disaster. By letting you copy it, the family gains a backup, security, insurance copy.
2. **Broker.** Offer to make them a copy when you make a copy.
3. **Trade.** Offer to exchange copies of records or items you have for letting you copy their materials.
4. **Family project.** Design a family project – biography, photo collection, newsletter – for which you need to copy and use their materials. This links your request to a family cause rather than just being personal.
5. **Purchase.** If the person's reluctance to share is because of the monetary value of the items, consider buying the material or at least a part of it.
6. **Take pictures.** They might have an heirloom locket or Civil War uniform or other valuable items they won't let out the door. In such cases, take pictures of them and offer to share copies of your photos.

Searching the Internet for Ancestor's Writings

The internet is an incredible resource in finding diaries, journals, postcards, letters, and other writings. I have found family documents on internet sites of library collections. As I was doing the research for this presentation, I found 30 letters that were written between Thomas Jefferson and my ancestors in the Jefferson Papers and 15 journal/diary entries relating to my ancestor's pioneer experiences in the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847-1868 collection.

To search the internet enter:

- Names of ancestors (direct and collateral lines)
- Surnames (various spellings)
- Names of individuals the ancestors were known to have worked with or had relationships with
- Places they lived and visited
- Important events they lived during or were a part of such as the civil war, influenza, or pioneer treks

Examples of search strategies are:

Keyword searches:

- diar\$ and literature [will retrieve 'diary', 'diaries', 'diarists', etc.]
- diar\$ and bibliography
- Virginia and diaries [for locating many individual diaries]
- diar\$ and statesm\$n
- memoirs and wom\$n

*Note: Use of the \$ is correct. It tells the search engine to retrieve anything that has these letters in these positions as part of the other words.

Subject searches:

- American diaries women authors
- Women United States diaries
- Women diaries
- English diaries
- Personal narratives [relating to individual events or time periods]

For more ideas of how to conduct an internet search, refer to the following:

Conducting Research on the Internet

<http://library.albany.edu/internet/research.html>

Searching the World Wide Web

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/internet/search/index.html>

Web Searching

<http://www.ipl.org/div/websearching/>

Types of Search Tools

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/ToolsTables.html>

Cyndi's List of Genealogy Resources on the Internet

<http://www.cyndislist.com/search.htm>

www.cyndislist.com/search.htm

A note about spellings. You will find, in old records, spelling was informal and inconsistent. Do not dismiss the name 'Hewes' if you are searching for 'Hughes.' In an early census enumeration, census takers reportedly spelled the surname 'Reynolds' thirty-four different ways. As you get deeper into genealogical research, you will become an expert at guessing how many ways a name may be spelled (or misspelled).

Searching in Libraries and Archives for Ancestor's Writings

I have found journals, diaries and letters that have been preserved in local historical societies, universities, and other institutions where they are available to researchers. Some have been published as books and, increasingly, many are available on the internet. A good place to start is look for writings in the areas where your family lived.

One genealogist told of an experience where she found a diary of an ancestor who lived in Virginia in New Mexico. The descendant who inherited the diary lived in New Mexico and gave it to a repository.

What to do When You Still Can't Find Written Word of Your Ancestor

My mother passed away in 1997 and I realized there was a lot I didn't know about her. I began to interview family and friends to gain their insights of her. To my joy, many of these persons had kept letters, greeting cards, and postcards that she had sent them over the course of her life. The information provided insights to her feelings about her children, her pains, joys, and desires. I was allowed to scan and photograph these documents.

Strategy 1: Your first option is to contact all of your relatives and see if they saved the writings of ancestors with whom your family may have had a relationship. Letters and diaries written by your ancestor's relatives, friends, and neighbors may contain material about your ancestor.

These letters and diaries will give you a glimpse into what your own ancestor's life was probably like, since relatives, friends, and neighbors probably came from the same socioeconomic background as your ancestor.

Several of my ancestors were Mormon pioneers of the mid 1800's. Although there are no surviving journals from my family of this time period, I have found journals of persons who were part of the same wagon train or handcart company. I have been able to review these writings and gain a better understanding of what my ancestor may have experienced. I found an entry about my progenitor from the Dan Jones Emigrating Company, Journal 1856 May-Dec.

September 9, 1856

Tuesday 9th[.] The remaining Waggon taken over the river[.] finished at 2 p.m. A yoke of Oxen belonging to the Church was missing. several brethren sent to search for them, and they returned to camp with them at 4.15 p.m. Bro. Elias Jones lost two gentle Cows on Sunday last <at the Loop [Loup] Fork Ferry> and up to this time they have not being found. We moved forward at 5 p.m. and camped at 8 p.m.[.] travelled 7 miles along the banks of the Loup Fork.

Strategy 2: Look for writings that discuss the same period, event, and so forth. Circumstances similar to theirs may be available in a personal account written by another. If you can find a relationship, either through bloodlines or common bonds, you'll discover a way to understand and add depth to your family's history. Look for similarities in lifestyle, social status, profession, or neighborhood. All of these can give you a good sense of how your ancestors lived and what they experienced.

On one occasion, I had received a clue about a letter that existed from a relative in 1862. I had seen the text which was a photocopy of photocopies, but I wanted to see the

original. I placed a query on the message boards, and in time, received a clue where to go. I eventually found the owner and was able to get a photograph of the letter.

Strategy 3: Place a query online or in a genealogical magazine and/or message board to see if some distant relative might be in possession of an ancestor's writings.

Summary Checklist of Where to Search for Ancestor's Writings

The following is a recap of where to search for writings (e.g. diaries, journals, letters, or postcards) of your ancestors.

1. Ask relatives if they possess any ancestors' writings.
2. Put queries in genealogical magazines/message boards and online, seeking writings from distant "genealogy" cousins.
3. Write to historical societies, archives, and libraries in your ancestor's locality to see if writing was deposited there.
4. Check reference guides to help locate writings in repositories.
5. Look for published writings, including anthologies.
6. Look for writings of your ancestor's friends, relatives, and neighbors.
7. Look for writings of people like your ancestor, who lived in the same geographic area, during the same time period, and from the same socioeconomic background.

Digital Reproduction & Transcription

As you review the writings of your ancestors, you will most likely want to transcribe the information making it easier to read and use in multiple formats when sharing on the internet and others. I have found artifacts such as diaries, journals, and letters to be very fragile, it seems as though the glue, string, and paper is disintegrating before my eyes. I prefer not to work with the original when I transcribe (keeping the original safe from becoming any more worn), but rather work with a digital reproduction.

1. Digital Reproduction. A digital reproduction is an electronic version of an artifact which is created using a scanner or digital camera.

When you are creating a digital reproduction, you will either want to reproduce the artifact including matching colors, shading, and flaws or have the intention to maximize the legibility of the item. I personally lean toward the side of digital reproduction for legibility while trying to preserve as much of the original. I will usually keep what I call my original file which is the exact image of the original and then I have the edited file which is the original with my desired edits.

I use Adobe PhotoShop as my image editing software. It allows one to adjust the contrast, color, and sharpness of an image. One can edit perceived flaws, creases, discoloration, water stains, or missing pieces.

2. Beginning Your Transcription Project. Before beginning your transcription project, it is important to gather basic information that will later form the description paragraph or introduction to help others understand the project.

Introduction. Provide an introduction to the project.

1. **Identification.** Provide background information about the project including the format, length, and other physical attributes.
2. **Document History.** Discuss the origin of the document and trace the history.
3. **Strengths and Weaknesses.** Note strengths or the unique nature of the project along with problems encountered or concerns about accuracy or authenticity.
4. **Acknowledgements.** Include credit and history of document ownership; credit for digital transcription and reproduction.

3. Transcription Editorial Guidelines. Transcription is the conversion of one form of language into another such as hand written letters into typewritten documents. As you begin to transcribe your documents, begin the project with a set of editorial guidelines that will help you maintain consistency. A few suggestions follow:

1. No attempt should be made to correct spelling or perceived "mistakes."
2. Avoid the use of capital letters except in those instances where the writer used a capital letter.
3. Make educated guesses when unsure of a word. However, use brackets [] when unsure of exact transcription. If you're unable to decipher the words, then use

- brackets and a note such as [illegible]. Some people choose to use colors for particular notations in a digital format.
4. Whenever possible, match the punctuation used by the author. Or, standardize punctuation. For example, you may choose to use commas and periods for dashes, vertical strokes, or other markings.
 5. You may or may not choose to maintain the formatting of the document such as line breaks.
 6. Sometimes areas of a document are illegible. Use the following strategies to help with difficult materials:
 - a. Examine individual letters and match them to other areas of the text.
 - b. Scan the document at a high resolution and zoom in electronically.
 - c. Read the sentence aloud and look for context and logical connections.
 - d. Ask someone else to read the passage.
 - e. Do not assume you know what the words or letters are.
 - f. Leave the passage and come back later with a clear mind.
 - g. If you still can't figure it out, take your best guess and put it in brackets.

The following are my personal guidelines I adopted to create a transcript from the Ohio Memory Project.

1. Create a new document in a program such as Microsoft Word, Edit Pad, or Word Pad.
 - a. When sharing with others save the document as ASCII or text only (.txt).
2. At the top of the page, type [page 1]
 - a. If the first page included is not the first page of the book or document, add a second line, such as [corresponds to page 456 of John Jones' Diary]
3. Hit return twice to place a blank line between the page information and the beginning of the transcribed text.
4. Copy text from the first page of the document.
 - a. It is important to remember that you are creating an exact copy of the original document in typed form, not editing or interpreting the original.
 - b. Each line of the transcript should follow exactly the spacing and line breaks in the original document, even if a sentence or thought ends after a line break.
 - c. Hit return twice after each line in the original to insert a blank line between the lines of text. *Do not select double-spacing from the formatting menu.*
 - d. Add comments in brackets (sparingly) to describe notes or scribbles that cannot be translated. Appropriate uses of comments include:
 - i. If a document has numerous pencil scribbles, type [numerous pencil scribbles] near the area where they occur on the page.
 - ii. If a word is illegible, type [illegible] in square brackets. Do this even if you can guess at part of the word.

- iii. If text is otherwise unusual, indicate how with such notes as [crossed out words], [on back of letter], [written in pencil].
 - iv. If there is a misspelling in the original, the transcript should include the same misspelling.
5. Following the last word or comment from page 1, type [page 2], then hit return twice and type text from second page.
 6. Repeat for remaining pages, but keep pages together in one document.
 7. A good transcript should follow the same form as the written page; the same words should be on the same lines in both the transcript and original document, etc. Here is an example of how a transcription from an original document looks.

[Page 1]

[corresponds to page 1 of Cleveland Ordinance Banning Baseball]

An Ordinance [underlined]

For the protection of the Public Ground be

Be it ordained [Be...ordained underlined] by the City Council of

Cleveland that from and after this dait it

Shall be unlawful for any person or

Persons to play at any game of Ball

Or at any other game or pastime [illegible]

the grass or grounds of any Public

Place or square shall be deface or

Injured, and any person or persons

who may be convicted of any of the

above offences before the Mayor shall

forefiet and pay to cit any sum

not less than five dollars at the [caret mark] discretion of the [above caret mark

(Word insertion)] Mayor with the cost of prosecution

Passed Mch 5/45

Attest JB [Illegible]

W [illegible] Goodwin

City Clerk Signed Alderman

4. Interpreting the Handwriting of Your Ancestors. Little time will be spent on interpreting handwriting other than to say that learning to read your ancestor's handwriting is an important skill to have. One resource I have referred to and find to be outstanding is, "Reading Early American Handwriting" by Kip Sperry. The book is designed to teach you how to read and understand the handwriting found in documents commonly used in genealogical research.

The Family History Value of the Post Card

While researching for family records, I have been fortunate to come across several postcard collections of ancestors. They have been a great snapshot into several aspects of my families lives. The value of postcards to family history are as follows:

1. Post card images are great resources to relate to your ancestors' time period.
 - See their hometown the way it looked back in the 20's or 30's.
 - View the courthouse that your great-grandparents went to for their marriage license...the old courthouse, not its modern replacement.
 - Is it a memento of some special vacation?
 - Is it a picture of Uncle Joe's hometown cafe?
 - Is it a reflection of their personal tastes or longings?
2. Postcards were kept as keepsakes or mementos of the sender.
3. Postcards were an inexpensive reminder of a special journey.
4. Postcards preserved pictures of families, family homes, hometowns and more.
5. People often buy postcards just because they're pretty pictures when framed & hung on a wall or put on a shelf.
6. Learn tidbits of information about the family.
7. Gain handwriting samples.
8. Find addresses to help you track family movements.

Even if you don't have any post cards from your ancestors, you can search for the post cards relating to the time period when your family lived in their hometown, clothing styles of the time period, etc. Start with the local historical society in the area in which your ancestor lived or at local antique stores. Many postcard collections are also beginning to spring up on the internet. Postcards can be a wonderful alternative to photographs for illuminating the lives of your ancestors.

Approximate Dating of Postcards When No Date is Present

Postcards went through many phases when particular design features were popular, so even if a postcard is not dated or was never mailed, it is still possible to determine an approximate time when it was printed.

Private Mailing Cards Period, 1898 - 1901:

- During the Private Mailing Card era, messages were not allowed on the back of the cards, so a small space was left on the front, for notes from the sender.
- The sender had to purchase a 1¢ stamp for the Private Mailing Card.
- The words "Private Mailing Card" were printed on the back of cards along with the statement "Authorized by Act of Congress of May 19, 1898" and "This side is exclusively for the Address" indicating that messages could only be written on the front.
- Also found on many of them was "Postal Card - Carte Postale" which indicated it was allowed to enter the international mail system.

Post Card Period, 1901-1907:

- In December 1901, the United States Post Office issued Post Office Order No. 1447 which allowed the words "Post Card" instead of the longer Postal Mailing Card.
- Messages were still not allowed on the back of cards. This is also called the Undivided Back Period.

Divided Back Period, 1907-1914:

- On March 1, 1907, a major change on the backs of postcards occurred.
- The left side of the back of the card was allowed for messages, while the right side was for the address.
- During this era, the blank space on the front of post cards, which previously was for messages, disappeared.

White Border Period, 1915-1930:

- Until this period German printers dominated the market in postcard printing.
- With the beginning of World War I, postcards were supplied mostly by printers in the United States.
- During these years printers saved ink by not printing to the edge of the card and leaving a white border around the image.
- Also during this time, the pictures on postcards were described in more detail on the back.

Linen Period, 1930-1944:

- With the development of new printing processes, postcards could be printed with high rag content, which gave them a look of being printed on cloth or linen.
- This period is also characterized by the use of bright colors.

- Most postcards also retained the white border, but some were printed to the edge of the card. The back remained virtually the same.
- Modern Photochrome-style Period, 1939 - to date:
- Modern Photochrome-style postcards first appeared in 1939 with the Union Oil Company carrying them in their western service stations.
- Production of the postcards was slowed during World War II because of supply shortages, but after the war, they dominated the postcard market.
- The photochrome postcards are in color, are the closest to real photographs, and are the ones most familiar to us today. Since 1952 post card rates have increased from 2¢ to 21¢.

Cataloging Letters and Post Cards

I have been fortunate to come across several postcard collections of my ancestors. I have scanned both the front and back of the cards as part of preservation and an easy way to study them. The following is an example of fields used in cataloging the post cards.

1. From:
2. To:
3. Post Mark:
4. Address:
5. Picture:
6. Series:
7. Subject:
8. Message:
9. Notes:

Citing Your Resources

As you use or make reference to your ancestors writings in your research, take the time to cite your sources. The following are examples of how to cite books, journals, letters, and articles.

1. Unpublished Document

1. **Descriptive Title of Document:** Personal History of John P. Jones
2. **Signification dates or Numbers:** Written Circa 1935
3. **Page Numbers or other Specific Designation:** Original owned by Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Spanish Fork, Utah
4. **Other Detail:** 4-page history written by daughter Mary Jones Wright
5. **Location and Form of Record:** Copy received and in possession of Barry Ewell, Riverton, Utah, 7 July 1997

Formatted:

“Personal History of John P. Jones,” Circa 1935, 4 pages, written by daughter Mary Jones Wright, copy received from Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Spanish Fork, Utah, 7 July 1997, in the possession of Barry Ewell, Riverton, Utah.

2. Journal:

1. **Author:** John Jones
2. **Title:** Journal of John Jones, Utah Pioneer
3. **Description of the Journal:** handwritten, 350 pages, leather-bound, January 15, 1887 to March 29, 1895
4. **Date:** January 15, 1891
5. **Specific Location:** Journal in possession of Barry Ewell, great, great grandson, Riverton, Utah
6. **Page:** 106-110, 287

Formatted:

John Jones, Journal of John Jones, Utah Pioneer, January 15, 1891, [Original handwritten, leather-bound 350 page journal, January 15, 1887 to March 29, 1895, in possession of Barry Ewell, great, great grandson, Riverton, Utah], pp. 106-110.

3. Personal Letter

1. **Author:** Mary Jones
2. **Description of the Letter:** Letter to Barry Ewell
3. **Date:** 23 February 1977
4. **Detail:** Weekly Letter from Mary Jones to Barry Ewell on Mission in Munich Germany. Topic of letter was trip to California.
5. **Specific Location:** Original handwritten letter in possession of Barry Ewell
6. **Form Used and Repository:** Hand Written

Formatted:

Mary Jones, Letter to Barry Ewell, 23 February 1977, [Original handwritten letter in

possession of Barry Ewell. Weekly Letter from Mary Jones to Barry Ewell on Mission in Munich, Germany. Topic of letter was trip to Utah.]

4. Book:

- 1. Author:** Michael E. Pollock
- 2. Title:** Bonds of Henrico County, Virginia, 1782-1853
- 3. Publication facts (place of publication, name of publisher, year):** Baltimore Maryland, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc, 1984
- 4. Page number:** 133

Formatted:

Michael E. Pollock, Marriage Bonds of Henrico County, Virginia, 1782-1853, (Baltimore Maryland, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc, 1984) p. 133.

5. Article:

- 1. Author:** E.E. Patton
- 2. Title of the article:** The Influence of the Huguenots
- 3. Name of Periodical:** The Huguenot
- 4. Publication facts (place of publication, name of publisher):** Vallejo, California, The Huguenot Society
- 5. Volume:** 10
- 6. Month/Season and Year:** 1939-41
- 7. Page Numbers:** 39-45

Formatted:

E.E. Patton, "The Influence of the Huguenots." The Huguenot (Vallejo, California, The Huguenot Society), Vol. 10 (1939-41), pp. 39-45.

6. Oral Interview

- 1. Title of notes or tape:** Oral interview with James N. Ewell
- 2. Date of interview:** 21 October 2001
- 3. Interviewer:** Barry Ewell
- 4. Present Owner's name and address:** Recording owned by Barry Ewell, Riverton, Utah
- 5. Form used and location:** James Ewell was living in Mt. Pleasant, Utah
- 6. Place of Interview:** Beaver, Utah
- 7. Evaluation information:** Interview focused on experiences as policeman in Las Vegas, Nevada from 1968 to 1973.

Formatted:

"Oral interview with James N. Ewell," 21 October 2001, by Barry Ewell, recording owned by Barry Ewell, Riverton, Utah, James Ewell was living in Mt. Pleasant, Utah. Interview took place in Beaver, Utah, interview focused on experiences as policeman in Las Vegas, Nevada from 1968 to 1973.

7. Photograph

1. Description: Photograph of Francis Marion Ewell

2. Date of Picture: Circa 1900

3. Location: Spring City, Utah

4. Taken by: George Edward Anderson

5. Specific Location: Glass plates in possession of Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Formatted:

Photograph of Francis Marion Ewell, Circa 1900, Spring City, Utah, taken by George Edward Anderson, glass plates in possession of Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Keeping a Journal

Flash forward 100 years and one of your ancestors will be seeking to better understand himself by trying to get to know you. What will you leave behind? Will there be videos to view, an oral interview to listen to or even a journal to read? Your ancestor will find your journal to be of great value. You will be one on one with him, sharing your innermost thoughts, feelings and reflections.

Your journal is the repository of your experiences. It becomes a guide, a mirror ... a confidant and friend. It is important to have a journal that is a statement of who you are. The following are a few ideas that will help improve your journal writing.

1. Your Journal is a Record of Your Life.

Most people think of journals as 'diaries,' and in a way they are. You will record important experiences in your journal, because they affect you. You will want to explore, not only your thoughts and feelings, but your experiences.

But a journal is not only a diary. Entries you make regarding your day, events you experience and their effects on you are only springboards to a more fulfilling activity. You will delve beyond the experiences, events and emotions to discover what essential teachings life holds for you.

As you write your journal, cover topics from a life and chronological point of view such as:

Life Topics

1. Economics, income, work, career
2. Living arrangements
3. Family developments (birth of sibling, death of grandparent, etc.)
4. Extended-family developments
5. Health
6. Education
7. Hobbies, interests, talents
8. Church/religion
9. Annual holidays and vacations
10. Friendships
11. Current events

Chronological Topics

1. Roots, or the person's family heritage up to his/her birth
2. Birth, including family setting into which the person was born
3. Pre-school childhood
4. Childhood, perhaps through grade school
5. Adolescent years
6. Coming of age as a young adult
7. Young parenting years

8. Later parenting years
9. Empty-nest years and retirement
10. Death and legacy

2. Choose to use several writing styles when composing your journal.

How boring if all you did for your journal was place a date and what you did for that day. The following are a few writing styles that you may choose on different occasions to help express your thoughts:

1. **Free writing** (stream of consciousness writing). Write anything and everything that comes to mind. You do not need to follow any logical formation of thoughts. You do not need to worry if grammar, spelling, or even the ideas are acceptable. Do not do anything that would interrupt the flow of thoughts from your mind to the paper.

Do not censor any thoughts. Do not concern yourself with any associations you would make. Some days, free writing will seem like an exercise in insanity as nothing makes sense. Other days, the thoughts and ideas revealed by free writing can be astonishing.

Free writing works best if you set a time limit of ten to thirty minutes. When you reread these pages, do not edit your work, just read them and enjoy the interesting way your mind works and how thoughts can flow from your creative center.

This is a wonderful technique to remove random thoughts from your mind and focus yourself to other tasks.

Focused Free writing. This is free writing when you start with a topic. Write down the topic at the beginning of the page. Then any and every association or thought that comes to mind, write it down. Soon you can take a topic without any ideas associated with it and make a myriad of lists, comments, and ideas. As with free writing, set a time limit and do not censor your thoughts or ideas – keep the pen moving across the page.

2. **Brainstorming.** This is a two-step process. First, write a topic at the top of the page. Make lists of all the random ideas associated with the topic. The ideas can be words, phrases, or sentences. When you have a large quantity of ideas, stop. The second step is to organize those ideas into groups. This technique helps you to see how various ideas fit together under one topic. If you group your ideas and have a list with only one or two ideas in it, brainstorm that list. This is a good way to make associations and find smaller topics under a larger heading.

3. **Journalist Questions.** Who? What? When? Why? Where? How? These questions force you to approach a topic from multiple perspectives. This is a good way to approach ideas you do not understand or to sort out problems in emotional perspective entries. Write down your topic or problem at the top of the page. Then ask each question in turn about your topic. Write down your response. Soon, you will have a logical organization of thoughts about your topic.
4. **Mapping** (Webbing, Clustering). This is a visual way of brainstorming. Write down your topic in the middle of the paper and circle it. Then draw lines from the main topic to other circles and write in each major sub-topic of the original topic. With each thought, connect it to the original topic, a sub-topic, or a sub-sub-topic. Continue branching off your thoughts until you run out of ideas. This is a great way to visualize and organize thoughts similar to a flow chart and lets you see how things are connected.
5. **Lists.** This is a quick and easy way to organize thoughts. Like a shopping list, make lists of what you are happy, upset, need to do, etc... In a short amount of time, you can have several lists of basic ideas. This is a quick way of catching up your journal writing if you have fallen behind, or an easy way to organize many thoughts before you start detail writing each one.
6. **Prompts.** These are words, quotes, or ideas that help to jump-start the imagination. If you have several favorite quotes, questions that are important to you, or ideas that you want to mull over at a later date, keep them together in a notebook, or a computer file, whatever organization method you enjoy. When you cannot think of anything to write, look over your prompts and see what sparks your imagination. Another technique is to open the dictionary, encyclopedia, or thesaurus to a random page and write about the first thing you see on that page.
7. **Perceived World.** This is the most common journal writing technique. Written from your point of view, it is how you perceive the world and events around you. Often called descriptive writing, it is putting your descriptions of events, people, and places into your journal.
8. **Reflective Writing.** When you analyze the past, whether it is your journal, past events, or past thoughts, and then commit them to paper, this is reflective writing. The distance between the past and the present lends additional insight into the issue and gives clarity of sight to an event not easily interpreted.
9. **Altered Point of View.** This is writing from the point of view of another person. This can often give insight into another person's emotions or decision-making. Each of us takes our own path through life, and when we walk in the shoes of another person, we can gain clarity of why a person took a different path through life.

10. Dialogue Writing. This form of writing is an imaginary conversation between you and other person. This is a difficult method of writing. Not only must you understand your own words and why you said them, but you must also be true to the person you are speaking with, and put the proper words into their mouths (not what you want them to say). Often, you can gain insight into the actions of others as you see how your words prompt their response, or vice versa.

Dialogue is a way of interacting with others, and this is a safe method for having a private conversation, or telling someone what you really think, wished, etc., without the pain or the knowledge of the other person knowing that the conversation ever took place on paper.

11. Unsent Letter Writing

Write an honest letter telling someone what you think, why an event occurred, an apology, or an explanation, etc., but never send it. The recipient of the letter is your journal. The emotions of the letter are between you and the one who will never read your thoughts and feelings. Writing a letter adds credence to an event. This is a way of communicating with a lost friend, deceased person, or a person never met.

3. Use your journal to

1. Find personal answers. It has been said that when we are confused about a situation we shouldn't be, because all of the answers lie within ourselves.

Do you believe this to be true? Have you ever been truly puzzled about something in your life? Once it was resolved did you feel that you knew the answers all along? Or did the answers lie elsewhere?

Write in your personal journal. If you are in the middle of a difficult time right now, try to work through it in your journal. If not, spend some time reflecting to see how you discovered the answers.

2. Set personal goals. The world is filled with possibilities for each of us. We can choose where to live, what job to take, what hobby to enjoy and much more. However, sometimes we start a project and lose interest quickly because we find another project that excites us. In the end, we find we have no time to set goals and even if we do, they are not accomplished.

Pick up the pen and begin to write down everything that interests you. Then take a look at all of the things you want to do. Pick two items and make them your goals. In your personal journal, write down the steps you will take to accomplish those goals and then sign the bottom. Imagine that

this is your own written contract and commit to work on those two things until they are complete.

- 3. Write about procrastination.** The project you found out about weeks ago is due tomorrow and you have done little work on it.

Does this sound like a familiar situation? Do you continually leave things till the last possible moment? Does this frustrate you? Is this a behavior that you would like to change? Or do you find this is the best way for you to work?

Try writing in your personal journal about procrastination. If this is a pattern you would like to break, write about the steps you might take to change it. If, on the other hand, this is a good way for you to work, spend time writing about why it works for you.

- 4. Write about fear.** Every person suffers from one type of fear or another in their lifetime. In order to feel truly alive, we need to face our fears. Once we do this, we step out of our inner prisons, sprout wings and fly. Do you think this statement is true?

Spend some time journaling on the idea of fear. What is your biggest fear? Do you think it's holding you back from accomplishing all you could do in your life? Do you feel you are ready to begin to overcome it? How will you begin?

- 5. Write about a journey.** Too often, as we work toward a goal we have set for ourselves, we wind up either fixating upon the obstacles along the road or we focus too hard on the goal itself. When we do this, we miss the magic and beauty of the journey.

Do you agree or disagree? Do you have a goal in your life? Are you missing all of the wonderful things you have the ability to gain a long the way, including meeting new people and learning new things about yourself and others? Or do you feel it will be good to accomplish the goal but it is the journey that brings the most rewards?

- 6. Write about Success.** Many people in this world equate success with money. The more you have the more successful you are.

Spend some time reflecting upon this idea in your journal. Do you agree with this statement? If so, write down the reasons why. If not, how would you define success?

- 7. Write about positive experiences.** Those who keep a positive attitude will be able to achieve anything. If they reach for the stars, they will touch them. If they want the moon, it belongs to them.

Do you believe that maintaining a positive attitude is the key to success? Or do you think that hard work and determination are the only keys? Think about times when you were feeling positive about something as opposed to negative – what happened?

Spend some time writing about this in your personal journal. If you find areas in your life where your thoughts take a negative turn, stay with that and try to explore the reasons why. If you want to challenge yourself, think of ways in which you can change your negative thinking into something more positive.

- 8. Write about self-reflection.** Have you ever been in an argument with someone and heard them say, “Stop thinking for me!”

If you think someone is angry or upset with you, do you ask them or do you just presume that they are? Do you find that you often let things build inside your head instead of talking to the person? Do you base your reactions to people on assumptions or fact?

Spend some time writing in your personal journal about how you relate to people. Think about how you approach situations and whether or not you are upfront and honest about your feelings and concerns.

4. Record your day in creative new ways.

What do you write in your journal about your day? Does it read something like: "Today I woke up, had Special K for breakfast and went to work where Catherine spent all day gossiping about Jenny's new haircut."

Consider some of the following ideas:

1. Lists: List parts of your day. Try - Things that made me smile today. Choices I had to make today. People I talked to today (and what the conversation was about). Conversations I overheard. Feelings I had over the day. Lists are endless ... some samples of mine are on [The Blog of Lists](#).
2. Gather up pieces of paper in your life for one day. Your bus ticket in the morning, you receipts from any shopping, a note from a friend left on your door, scribbles from your note pad at work, and a cutting from today's paper or magazine that you read. It is endless. And fun to look back on years later ...
3. Use your digital or phone camera to make a visual journal for the day.
4. Write your day as if you were telling a story about yourself. Write about your day in the third person ... "BJ was tired from a restless night when she tripped over the cat on the way to the shower ..."

5. Write about the most ordinary parts of your day - what you ate, describe the journey to work, write about how you choose what to wear each day. These little ordinary details will be interesting reading in years to come. Write to your future self ... (more on this in the next post).

5. Find a comfortable place to journal.

Only you will know where you are comfortable journal writing. Will it be sitting at a desk or on the boardwalk by the ocean? Curled up in a big easy chair or sprawled out across a floor? Propped up by comfy pillow in your bed? On a train? In a park?

Listen to your inner voice; it will guide you to that safe, comfortable space. Once you find it, you will be able to produce. Don't be afraid to experiment. Try everything to see what works best for you.

6. Find the best time of day to journal write.

Explore your journal writing at various times of the day to see what works best for you. Some people write when they first wake up in the morning. This way their thoughts have not been disrupted by anything yet. Some people will journal in the afternoon after lunch. Others are night writers who like to do reflective journaling to touch on things that happened throughout the day.

Personal journaling is a gift you give to yourself. Whatever time you choose, make sure that you carve out enough time for yourself to focus on your writing. I like to write at night; the night time is my time to unwind. However, if the mood strikes I will journal at any time, anywhere.

7. Find the right journal for you!

Journaling should feel like coming home and curling up in your favorite space. So what can help you to achieve that feeling? First and foremost, find a journal that represents you.

Will you be carrying it around? If so, you will want a compact one. Do you like to fold the book back on itself? Try a wire bound journal. Do you want lined pages or blank?

Now for the fun part! Do you like colorful, floral or textile designs, silly characters, black and white photos, or maybe even reprints of famous paintings on the covers?

Think about all of these things and then experiment to see which type suits you best.

Presentation Resources

The following are resources used in preparing this presentation.

1. Dear Diary: Discovering Your Female Ancestors
<http://genealogy.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.genealogy.com/genealogy/87%5Fcarmack.html>
2. Diaries & Journals << Family Records <<
<http://www.byubroadcasting.org/Ancestors/records/family/table1.html>
3. Diaries of the Seventeenth Century
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/society_culture/society/diaries_01.shtml
4. Diaries, Journals, Logs, and Blogs
<http://escrapbooking.com/diary/index.htm>
5. Discovering an Ancestor's Religion
<http://genealogy.allinfoabout.com/features/religion.html>
6. Discovering the Personal Side of Your Female Ancestors
<http://womenshistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa022403a.htm>
7. Find your ancestors with family history treasures most cherished: Old family letters, diaries, and journals
<http://amberskyline.com/treasuremaps/ancestors.html>
8. Journal Tips
<http://journal.lifetips.com/cat/55900/journal-writing-prompts/index.html>
9. Journal Writing Tips
<http://blogcharm.com/journalwritingtips>
10. Journals & Diaries - Part II
<http://globalgenealogy.com/globalgazette/gazsd/gazsd22.htm>
11. Journals & Diaries - Part III
<http://globalgenealogy.com/globalgazette/gazsd/gazsd23.htm>
12. Life's Sticking Points
http://www.writersdigest.com/articles/sticking_points.asp
13. Making Sense of Letters and Diaries
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/letters/question2.html>
14. Old handwriting in genealogy research
<http://www.amberskyline.com/treasuremaps/oldhand.html>
15. Primary Sources: Interpretation
<http://escrapbooking.com/primarysources/interpretation.htm>
16. Using Libraries and Archives
<http://www.arkansasresearch.com/g-lib.html>
17. Welcome to Past Voices
<http://pastvoices.com/>
18. Writing it Down
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/midwife/sfeature/sf_diaries.html