

## **Have You Ever Wanted to Write Your Family History? Course Summary**

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Osher, June 2021**

Have you ever wanted to write a family history, but you aren't sure how to go about it? This lecture will focus on both the content and the process of writing and publishing a family history. The first part will be about content: How do you decide what to write about? How do you go about turning the piles of stuff on your desktop (either literal or virtual) into a story that someone may actually want to read? The second part will be about process: How do you turn your story into a manuscript for publication? How does self-publishing work? What are the steps involved in actually publishing something?

The following paragraphs will summarize what I'll be talking about in this class:

- Deciding what to write about
  - When you're facing piles of stuff on your desk, in your file cabinet, on your bookshelves, or on your computer, it can be daunting. How to decide what to write about?
  - You can always write chronologically – either going backward or forward in time. Select one of your family lines that you know a lot about, make sure your research is both extensive and sound, and then plan to tell their story.
  - You can also write thematically – you could select a particular year, for example, and tell about where your ancestors were in that year. Or you could pick an event – the American Revolution or the Civil War, for example – and write about all of your ancestors who participated in that war. Maybe you had a lot of clergy in your family – write about them. Or a lot of members of the military – write about them. You can also write about yourself – after all, no one knows your story like you do, and you can feel good that you're leaving this behind for your grandchildren and their grandchildren.
  - Brainstorming is a great way to get your creative juices flowing. You can talk to your genealogy friends and figure out a story to tell, or you can consult other genealogists – there are a lot of blogs, newsletters, and Facebook Groups where people share their research and writing ideas. If you read them, you'll begin to think about how your research could be approached in the ways they approach theirs.
- Writing about it
  - The Words
    - Tell a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Take the facts from your family tree and make sentences from them
    - I write on the keyboard, but you do what works for you. Have you ever explored how to use the Microsoft Word feature Talk to Text? Check it out. If you activate it, you can simply tell your story out loud and your computer will convert it to text. It's amazing. This is perfect for those of you whose typing skills are limited
    - Begin at the beginning, if you can. But if you're having trouble getting started, you can always write the introduction last.

- Don't worry about getting it right.
- The Mechanics
  - Find a word processing program that you like. I use Microsoft Word, and it's compatible with the publishing sites I've used.
  - Write first, then edit. If you try to sculpt each sentence as you go along, you'll never finish
  - Have someone else read what you've written. Make sure you tell them what you want them to do – a close edit or a general read to see if what you're written makes sense.
- How to Finish
  - Set a deadline and stick to it
  - Stop writing new stuff and begin to edit and format
  - New stuff will emerge in this process – make a note of it but don't write it yet. There will be time to put the new material in after you've done a serious editing and formatting job on your manuscripts.
- Publishing It
  - You haven't come this far just to put your manuscript in a file folder. Publish it!
  - You could publish it commercially. I don't know anything about that
  - You could self-publish it
    - Amazon – either to Kindle or print
    - Lulu – create an ebook or a print book. I'm going to talk about using Lulu
  - Steps for using Lulu
    - Create an account (it's free)
    - Complete your manuscript
    - Convert it to a PDF
    - Upload it to Lulu
    - Design your book and cover
    - Print – order as many or as few copies as you want.