

Writing and Publishing Your Family History

Class 1: Getting Started

Sharon Inglis, sharon.inglis@nehgs.org

Decide: Who is your audience?

Choose a format

- Look at other family history publications to get ideas.
- **Register-style** and **Ahnentafel** are genealogical formats; not every book has to follow a genealogical format.
- Every book *does* have to include narrative to record the stories of the people in the book. Family history is all about *people!*
- If you have a lot of illustrations, you can place all the source citations at the back of the book as **endnotes** rather than footnotes at the bottom of every page. (Keep them as footnotes while you are writing, however, so you can “cite as you write” more easily.)
- Illustrations and subheads / short sections make your work more accessible to all ages.

Define the scope by making a table of contents

- Don't try to do it all!
- Material that doesn't fit elsewhere can be put in an appendix.

Organize your research

- Paper files and digital files should both be organized into folders that match your table of contents.
- Make notes to yourself in your Word manuscript; start each with **<NOTE:>** or **<ART:>** so you can search for them.
- Try exporting a *Register*/descendancy or *Ahnentafel* / ancestor table report from your genealogical software.

Gather your tools

1. Your paper files
2. Your electronic files
3. Your family tree / genealogical software
4. Online and print writing references
5. Your stylesheet
6. Online dictionary
7. Microsoft Word or other word-processing software

Things Word can do:

- *Register* template
- Sequence numbering
- Change tracking
- Index tagging

General hints

- Leave the indexing to a professional.
- Indexing is always the very last step; no changes should be made *at all* after indexing begins.
- Set aside time to write each day or week.
- Make a dedicated workspace for your writing.
- Don't be afraid to rethink your TOC if what you have isn't working.
- Celebrate your progress!

Resources

Penny Stratton, "Writing and Publishing Your Family History," subject guide,

<https://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read/writing-publishing>.

Penny Stratton and Henry B. Hoff, eds., *NEHGS Guide to Genealogical Writing* (Boston: NEHGS, 2014).

Portable Genealogist Compilation: Writing (Boston: NEHGS, 2017).