

9 Tips for Interviewing Relatives

Many people new to family history ask the question “where do I start gathering information?” One of the best answers is to start by talking with your relatives: parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. If you have a tree full of names and you want to know more about your heritage the best sources are those same relatives.

Interviewing your older family members may provide you with family names, dates, locations, photos, and wonderful stories. Every little snippet of information is a clue to help you in your research. Stories bring your ancestors to life. You can transcribe these stories and attach them to your family tree so generations in the future will enjoy them, too.

Begin by making a list of living people whose stories need to be captured. These people may also be a good source for photos and documents.

The memories your Grandmother has of her Grandmother will be gone when she passes away. She is the perfect source to learn about your Great -great Grandmother. Don't miss out on opportunities to record the past.

Here are nine tips to make family interviews an enjoyable activity for you and your family.

1. **Seize the Moment.** Most of us have *smartphones* with voice and video recorders built in. You never know when your relative will start sharing a memory. Be ready to record at any time and you will capture some precious gems.
2. **Plan an Evening.** Schedule a time to meet with some of your extended family. Serve dinner or dessert. Then spend some time talking and asking questions. Be sure to have that recorder up and running. Prepare a list of questions in advance. Be sure the questions are respectable and handle delicate situations carefully. If you are really serious about this, you might even send them a couple of questions ahead of time so they can search their memories for answers.
3. **Capture the Video.** Once our loved ones pass on their voices and faces will dim in our memories. What a treasure it is to have captured their faces and voices as they share their life stories.
4. **Upload and Share.** Many family history and social media websites allow you to upload these precious audio and video files and attach them to your ancestors' profiles. They add a wonderful dimension that goes beyond documents and written short stories.

5. **Let Them Do the Talking.** The skillful family history interviewer will say as little as possible and allow their relative to take center stage. Don't be afraid to let them pause and think before answering a question. Encourage them with your expressions rather than frequent verbal cues. Allow them to ramble and follow their stream of memories. They may end up sharing things you had not even thought to ask.
6. **Ask Open Ended Questions.** Ask questions that cannot be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. "How did you spend your Saturday afternoons as a child?" "What was your Grandmother's house like?" etc.
7. **Songs and Poems.** Does your relative have favorite songs they are always singing? Do they have a favorite poem they learned as a child that they still recite? Invite them to sing or recite. Then ask them why that song or poem is important to them after all these years.
8. **Photos and Memorabilia.** Prepare before hand by gathering photos and scrapbooks that will trigger memories and fuel the narrative. Keep a pencil handy to label those photos if they need it. If you are at their home, ask the story behind a piece of furniture, jewelry or keepsake.
9. **Break it Down.** These days, we are accustomed to scrolling through social media, flipping through magazines and channel surfing. We are more likely to catch a story and re-share it if it is relatively short. Once you have your interview, try to break it down into smaller chunks that can be labeled "16th Birthday" or "Christmas 1940". Audio and Video editing and software make this process fairly simple. Or, start and stop your audio and video recorder with each question.

For additional information and instruction on family interviews and on attaching memories to Family Search go to; **thefhguide.com**.

To the right of the family history guide logo, click on 'family search'

A horizontal list of goals will appear. Select goal #3 to learn about interviews. Select goal #8 to learn about attaching stories to Family Tree.

For questions or assistance feel free to contact any member of the Mueller Park 10th Ward Family History Committee.