

How to Start your own Family History Writing Group

The Genealogy Ensemble model

- 1) Gather six to ten people interested in writing family stories and/or genealogy;
- 2) Meet regularly (once a month);
- 3) Write a short story of 500 words for each meeting, or revise a story for each meeting;
- 4) Send out your stories two days before the meeting by email;
- 5) Come prepared with print-outs to discuss and help edit each story;
- 6) Try to give your 'personal' family story some historical context with extra research.

Consult the attached e-pub book of **Writing Tips** prepared by *Beads in a Necklace* co-editors Janice Hamilton and Tracey Arial, both experienced journalists.

At Genealogy Ensemble, we cover all our stories every meeting—and there are nine of us. Amazingly, everyone regularly writes every month, with the occasional exception for life issues. To keep our meetings to roughly to 2 hours, we all write 500 words maximum and send our story texts only by email two days ahead of time so that everyone can read and edit all the stories before the meeting.

Then the meeting can stick to what we loved or what we might change to improve the stories, sharing the photos, keepsakes or mementos that go with the story and catching up between us. Every meeting is full of discussion about our wicked and wonderful ancestors and the challenges they faced.

Over time, we've become more rigorous about technique, research and sources, but that's because we have an unusually dedicated group.

It's taken us five years of monthly research and writing to develop an incredible cohesion, but we didn't begin that way. Be open to meeting people where they are so that you too can develop together into what you want to create.

In the beginning, people were asked not bring photos, etc. because the story should say everything and writers shouldn't rely on visual aids. Over time, with our blog, we began adding photos to ours stories.

**However, there are no fast rules. Every group is different.
Here are some start-up tips.**

At the first meeting, have a discussion about what you want to accomplish together and what the rules for participating are. Some writers' groups focus on one single story per meeting, others send stories ahead of time, others share their work in person at the meeting and edit as many as they have time for. Some groups simply allow members to talk about their work without even sharing it.

You can choose whatever you think will work for your group.

Some good questions to ask include:

Where will you meet?

How often?

What time?

For how long?

Will you include drinks and snacks?

Will you allow people to attend whether they've submitted a story or not?

How long should stories be?

Will you limit them?

Can people include photos and other visuals with their stories?

Will you limit peoples' comments?

How will you ensure that every author gets positive feedback as well as criticism?

How will you make your discussion a safe place for sharing deeply personal work?

Will you have an animator?

Will you invite special guests? If so, how often?

Good luck and good writing!