

Brief Guide to Putting Together a Family History

Some Key Structural Principles

Introductions

Set the scene for every section, web page, blog post or chapter.
Introduce characters and events logically and coherently

Keep it relevant and interesting

Background context should fit with the people and places you are writing about. Do not put it in just for the sake of it.
Make every document, historical fact or image work.

Signposting

Who, what where, when, why and how are the questions that underpin our research. They are also fundamental to structuring an ancestral story.
Don't be afraid to remind readers who is who, how they relate to others, where and when they are placed in the story and why.

General Points

If your work contains dialogue that is not a verbatim transcript you should indicate this in the introduction or in a footnote to the first piece of dialogue. In an introduction you might say something like:

These are quotes of what Norah said her mother told her.

These conversations are recreations based on my recollections.

All dialogue has been recreated from the recollections and stories told by people who were present at the time.

If you have speculated where there are gaps in your knowledge then tell your reader. Do not make them have to work out what is fact and fiction.

Citations, Footnotes and Endnotes

- You **MUST, MUST, MUST** acknowledge where your information came from whether it is a document or book. Do not forget that genealogical websites such as Ancestry and findmypast are not sources.
- Create a general list of sources used.
- Check owner and record office guidelines and use their preferred method of citation.
- There are different methods of citing from printed sources. Unless you have a publisher who insists on a particular method then choose the style that suits you best and be consistent.
- If you are not sure what method to use look at some popular non fiction books and copy the format they use.

Unless you cite your sources within the text footnotes and endnotes are generally needed when:

- a) You quote directly from source material, published or unpublished.

Brief Guide to Putting Together a Family History

- b) You refer to something that obviously has come from another source, even though you may not be quoting directly.
- c). You wish to expand a particular point without putting it in the main body of the text. Personally, I think that in general if you need to comment on something in this way then it belongs in the text. The exceptions are long and/or technical descriptions/explanations of something.

Many authors who wish to or need to save space create a blanket statement saying that all information was obtained from the sources listed at the end of the book. For specific references contact the author....

Avoiding plagiarism

- Always record with where your notes come from, i.e. document name, reference and record repository; website; author; date; publisher etc.
- Put as much information into your own words as possible (paraphrasing).
- Avoid using overly long quotes. Putting it into your own words also makes a piece more interesting to read.
- If you have used a printed source or type of document extensively for background information then you can refer to chapters, a group or years within a register or a bundle of letters rather than list each page.
- Distinguish between your own research and interpretations and those of others.

How to present quotations on the page

Below are some guidelines on presenting quotes based on the style guide of my publisher Pen and Sword Books. However, you will find there are variations between different publishers and academic organisations. If in doubt check the style guide those who you wish to emulate.

1) Short quotations (i.e. of less than about 50 words) should be enclosed in single quotation marks and run on with the main text. For example:

It was 'an affront to the sensibilities of all who witnessed it to see this woman of very questionable character for respectability'...

2) For quotations within quotations. Use double quotation marks within single quotation mark, i.e. " " For example:

Mordaunt expressed his bitterness at the reaction of Thomas Coke in another letter to Lady Camelford on the 6th January 1794. 'My present situation with respect to M^r Coke is I apprehend much misrepresented by many people. Your Ladyship may recollect the reluctance with which I entered into his Corps of Volunteers... .. Shenstone said "I will be no man's enemy but I can be half a friend"'.

Brief Guide to Putting Together a Family History

3) Interpolations in quotations are permissible if enclosed in square brackets (never parentheses). For example:

He thought him essentially honourable although 'in some measure seduced by [the] subtleties' of others'.

4) Longer quotations can be separated from the main text by being indented, without quotation marks, using single spacing. For example:

John explained how:

This £400 was trust money vested in the hands of Dawson & myself, & I suffered him to appropriate this money to his own use, giving me his bond for it, & by virtue of which I shall now only receive a few shillings in the pound in common with other creditors. – To replace this sum of £400 & for other purposes, I want to borrow immediately the sum of £1000, & to ask if you will lend me that sum, such security being given for it, as you may deem satisfactory – Probably you may not think any bond sufficient security, if not, I can offer you a mortgage upon my property here, which is perfectly free from any incumbrance, & is worth about £3000. Mr. Stokes of Fakenham is my solicitor, & I will enable him to answer any question you may wish to ask, provided you feel disposed to comply with my request.

Alternatively, if a quote is spread over several paragraphs, then a quotation mark should open each paragraph, but only the final paragraph requires a closing quotation mark.

'This £400 was trust money vested in the hands of Dawson & myself...
'I will enable him to answer any question you may wish to ask, provided you feel disposed to comply with my request'.

5) Ellipsis are dots used to indicate that some text has been omitted from a quotation. These gaps should be indicated by three... full stops.

Ellipsis at the end of a sentence should be indicated by four dots in total, comprising three full stops, a gap and then another dot... .

Large gaps in text should be indicated by three sets of ellipses like this... ...
...

A Couple of Printing Tips

Text size and fonts

Most publishers or self-publishing companies ask for text to be one and a half or double spaced.

Font size 10 or 12. Text should be in Arial or Times Roman font.