

The New York Times

TECH TIP

Record and Share Your Family History in 5 Steps

Holiday gatherings offer a great time to create a multimedia digital archive of interviews with your relatives so they can share their memories with the current — and future — branches of the tree.



By **J. D. Biersdorfer**

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Many people have pieced together their own family tree. But how much do you really know about the early lives of your living relatives, especially those with decades of stories to share?

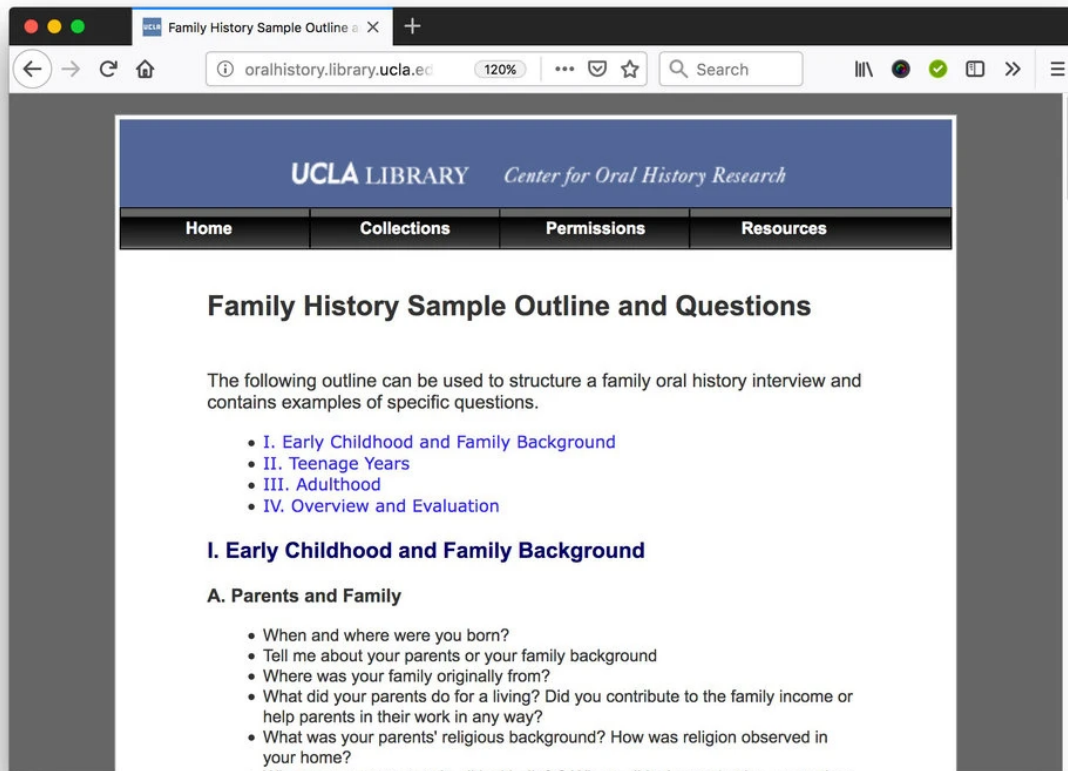
To learn more, take the time to talk during family gatherings over Thanksgiving and the holiday season. And make sure to save that oral history for future generations: Record and preserve it with a multimedia digital archive, with video or audio, or with both. Here are five simple steps to get you started.

Step 1: Prepare Your Questions.

Do everyone a favor and plan ahead. To be as thorough and efficient as possible, you'll want to know what to ask before you whip out the recorder to interview the family matriarch over her pumpkin pie. And find a relaxed setting to calm any stage fright.

Ask your relatives to dig back in their pasts: What's your first memory? What was your favorite song growing up? How did you win that medal? If you don't want to put your interviewees on the spot, send them the questions ahead of time. And ask them to tell treasured family tales in their own words.

If you're not sure what to ask, search a few family history websites like Ancestry.com or The Genealogy Guide for sample questions. The Center for Oral History Research at the University of California, Los Angeles, also has a good list of questions.



If you're not sure what topics will get your relatives talking, look for sample questions on research and genealogy sites. The New York Times

Step 2: Recording Video? Go Steady.

Smartphones and digital cameras are great for video interviews, and you can use video-editing software to edit the clips later. But consider getting a tabletop tripod for the phone or camera (often less than \$25) to stabilize the recording and free you up to interact more with your subject.

When recording video interviews, park the camera on a tripod to prevent image shakes and to keep you focused on the interview.

The New York Times

If you're serious about sound quality, an external microphone can also improve your interview. A good small clip-on lapel (lavalier) microphone for smartphone or camera — like the Boya BY-M1 or the Rode SmartLav+ — costs \$20 to \$60 and can make your subjects more at ease than a hand-held mic shoved in their faces.

Step 3: Consider an Audio Recording App.

Video files can be huge and some relatives may be uncomfortable on camera, so recording a simple audio session is another approach. The iPhone has a Voice Memos app, and if your Android phone didn't come with a voice recorder, go to the Google Play store. An external microphone can help here, too.

Voice recorder apps for Android and iOS can capture (and later edit) your audio interviews with relatives.

The New York Times

If you prefer not to load up your phone's storage, a pocket digital voice recorder is an alternative. Wirecutter, a New York Times company that tests and reviews products, recommends the Sony UX560 model, which can record up to 39 hours of MP3 audio and has a USB connector for moving the files to the computer.

Recording directly onto the laptop with an external microphone (like a podcast) is another way to capture the spoken-word history. Free software like the cross-platform Audacity or GarageBand for iOS and macOS can also be used to edit the interviews.

Step 4: Digitize Old Film and Tapes.

Some family historians started recording long before the modern tech boom, like a grandfather's World War II experiences saved on an audio cassette. If you have treasured recordings on ancient formats made with long-gone devices, look for a well-reviewed conversion service that will transform the material into digital files.

Memories Renewed (favored by Wirecutter) and Lotus Media are among the mail-in media conversion shops that handle several formats, including 8- and 16-millimeter film reels, VHS and Hi8 video, and audiotape. Walgreens and Costco also have media-transfer services.

Gadgets like an inexpensive USB-equipped cassette player can transfer audio from a tape to a computer.

The New York Times

If you still have the old video playback hardware, kits like the \$70 Roxio Easy VHS to DVD 3 package (or a similar product) let you do it yourself. For old cassettes, gadgets like the ClearClick Cassette Tape to USB Converter or ION Audio's Tape Express Plus connect to the computer's USB port and digitize the audio when you push "Play."

Step 5: Share Your History.

When you have finished and edited your interviews, loop in the rest of the family. You can post the files to a password-protected file-sharing site (like Dropbox, Google Drive, iCloud or OneDrive) for others to stream or download.

Uploading the audio and video files to a private folder on a sharing site is a simple way to let others stream or download the archive. The New York Times

Some genealogy sites allow media uploads to family-tree pages. If you have an account with one of these services, see if it can handle audio and video files. And if your site doesn't allow uploads, store the content on a sharing site and post links in the biographical sections for each recorded relative in your tree.

If you have a large family, compiling the interviews from your archive can be a lot of work. But generations down the line, the voices of your ancestors will still be heard.

J.D. Biersdorfer has been answering technology questions — in print, on the web, in audio and in video — since 1998. She also writes the Sunday Book Review's "Applied Reading" column on ebooks and literary apps, among other things. @jdbiersdorfer

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