



# Publishing Church History

## CHURCH HISTORY GUIDES

COLLECTING,  
PRESERVING,  
AND SHARING  
CHURCH HISTORY



# **Publishing Church History**

## **CHURCH HISTORY GUIDES**

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# Church History Guides: Publishing Church History **Overview**

Following these four steps will help Church History Advisers as they produce Church products.

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## Defining Your Purpose

Publishing Church history is a vital part of enabling the rising generations to learn and care about the Church's past. Doing so helps individuals feel a deeper connection to the people, places, and events that have made the Church what it is today.

Today, we can publish Church history in many ways, which brings both opportunities and challenges. Begin by defining your purpose and intended audience. Then select a publishing format and a distribution channel.

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## Finding Stories to Share

Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church Historian and Recorder from 2005 to 2012, said, "History in its most basic form is a record of people and their lives, and from those lives come stories and lessons that can reinforce what we believe, what we stand for, and what we should do in the face of adversity" ("Stand in the Sacred Grove" [Church Educational System devotional, May 6, 2012]; [lds.org/broadcasts](https://www.lds.org/broadcasts)).

Find stories that reinforce your purpose and relate to your audience but be sure to use reliable sources and to be accurate in the details.

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## Writing History

Follow a writing process that includes:

- Listing the details that will help the reader understand the story and its proper context.
- Making an outline to define how you want the story to flow.
- Creating multiple drafts that are reviewed by peers.
- Having a qualified person edit the final product to clean up grammar and style.

Let your sources guide your interpretation, and try not to let your biases influence your conclusions. Do not include information that is sacred, private, or confidential.

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## Sharing

Publishing Church history is accomplished most effectively when your ideas align with the priorities set by the Area Presidency and when you collaborate with others. Working in alignment with area leaders is essential and qualifies you to receive assistance from the Spirit. Work closely with the area communication committee and the publishing services manager, and be sure to follow the correlation process.

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Still shot from the Church history video entitled “That We Might Be One: The Story of the Dutch Potato Project.”



# Introduction



Who is your audience? What would they find interesting and appealing?

Keeping records has long been emphasized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When the Church was first organized on April 6, 1830, the Lord declared to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). John Whitmer, called as the Church historian in 1831, was told to keep “a history of all the important things which he shall observe and know concerning my church” (D&C 69:3). The Lord further taught Whitmer that keeping such histories was important for “the rising generations” of the Church (D&C 69:8) so they could know of its past and be prepared to build Zion. President Gordon B. Hinckley emphasized the importance of knowing the past: “All of us need to be reminded of the past. It is from history that we gain knowledge which can save us from repeating mistakes and on which we can build for the future” (“Reach with a Rescuing Hand,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 85).

Publishing Church history is a vital part of enabling the rising generations to learn and care about the Church’s past. Historical works benefit not only those who read and see them but also those who write and create them. Church history helps individuals feel a deeper connection to the people, places, and events that have made the Church what it is today. Understanding how those in the past endured their difficulties puts our own trials and challenges into perspective and increases our testimonies of the gospel. President Henry B. Eyring shared how reflecting on the past changed how he viewed his life: “More than gratitude began to grow in my heart. Testimony grew. I became ever more certain that our Heavenly Father hears and answers prayers. I felt more gratitude for the softening and refining that come because of the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ. And I grew more confident that the Holy Ghost can bring all things to our remembrance—even things we did not notice

or pay attention to when they happened” (“O Remember, Remember,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 67).

This guide is intended to help Church history advisers create Church publications. However, individuals sometimes seek guidance from Church history advisers regarding their efforts to publish personal histories, family histories, unit histories, or country or regional histories. The Church history adviser website at [history.lds.org/adviser](http://history.lds.org/adviser) has useful handouts that can guide Church members seeking such direction.

Today, we can publish Church history in ways that past generations could not, which brings both opportunities and challenges. Your publication can take any number of formats, such as articles, books, podcasts, slideshows, and videos. These can be delivered through many distribution channels, including bookstores, Church magazines, Church curriculum, presentations, social media, or Internet sites. Each format and distribution channel has its own set of requirements.

Whichever format and distribution channel you choose, consider the following before beginning your project:

- Who is your audience? What would they find interesting and appealing?
- What do you want to communicate to them? What is your purpose in publishing?
- How will you gather information, and how will you assess the sources you find?
- How will you best organize your history to communicate clearly the points you want to make?

This guide will introduce a four step process that will help you successfully share Church history. Taking time to read and follow these steps will ensure that your history will be useful and engaging for the rising generations.



Early manuscript of Doctrine and Covenants 69.



Your publication can take any number of formats, such as articles, books, podcasts, slideshows, and videos.



# Defining Your Purpose

**B**EFORE YOU BEGIN CREATING your publication, define your purpose. Whom do you want to reach? What might they gain from your publication? Your purpose should align with the priorities outlined in the area plan and be approved by the Area Presidency. Document your purpose and refer to it often throughout the project.



## Understanding Your Audience

Understanding your audience will help you accomplish your purpose. Spend time learning about your intended audience. What are they interested in? What is the best way to communicate with them? Your area publishing services manager can help you conduct audience research through focus groups, surveys, and other methods. The insights you gain will guide later decisions about what details to include and how to deliver your publication.

## Choosing a Format and Distribution Channel

There are many ways to share Church history. Your area's communication committee and publishing services manager can help you choose appropriate formats and distribution channels. They may also assist in creating content, especially if you are sharing through a Church website or publication.

It can be difficult to decide on the right formats and distribution channels, but don't be discouraged. You will learn with each attempt and improve your effectiveness over time. Try to choose the best methods for reaching your audience given your available resources. The following list contains several options and explains possible advantages and disadvantages.

(Left) Your area publishing services manager can help you conduct audience research through focus groups, surveys, and other methods.

A compelling online article can often reach a far broader audience than a printed book.



**Online Article:** For many people, online content is easy to read and to share with friends. A compelling online article can often reach a far broader audience than a printed article. Individual stories that bring together faith and history, concise historical overviews, time lines, or answers to common questions work well in this format. Word counts under 2,500, supplemented by images, are ideal. Consider publishing online on your country site, on LDS.org, on history.lds.org, or on a private blog.

**Online Multimedia:** Combining stories with historical photographs, background videos, and personal interviews can increase the interest of your audience. Multimedia products, such as videos, slide shows, audio recordings, and podcasts, work best online when under 10 minutes in length. One to three minutes is ideal.



Combining stories with historical photographs, background videos, and personal interviews can increase the interest of your audience.

Some multimedia products can be expensive to produce. However, online photo galleries with short captions are a low-cost way to share history.

**Magazine or Newspaper Article:** Articles are good for communicating both specific stories and general information. Typically articles are much shorter than books. For instance, Church magazines prefer articles under 2,000 words. Magazines and newspapers in your local area may occasionally have an interest in stories relating to the Church.

**Book:** A book is a good option for communicating in-depth or complex information about broad concepts or topics. Books vary significantly in length and can be published by the Church, by a professional publisher, or privately. However, they can be expensive to produce and may not be purchased or widely read.



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**E-Book:** Publishing an electronic book is less expensive than printing a book, and offering both an electronic and print edition can extend your book's reach. However, using the e-book format exclusively could limit practical access for readers without Internet connectivity or familiarity with digital formats. E-books can also be difficult to navigate between different sections of the book.

**Social Media:** Single photos with brief captions, short stories, and pertinent facts can be effectively shared through social media outlets. Consistently providing new content will likely require a long-term resource commitment.



Lectures or panel discussions provide an opportunity to interact with an audience and to respond to questions and concerns.

**Presentation:** A skilled public speaker can effectively share Church history. Lectures or panel discussions provide an opportunity to interact with an audience and to respond to questions and concerns. Recording and distributing copies or streaming the presentation online extends the reach of a presentation.

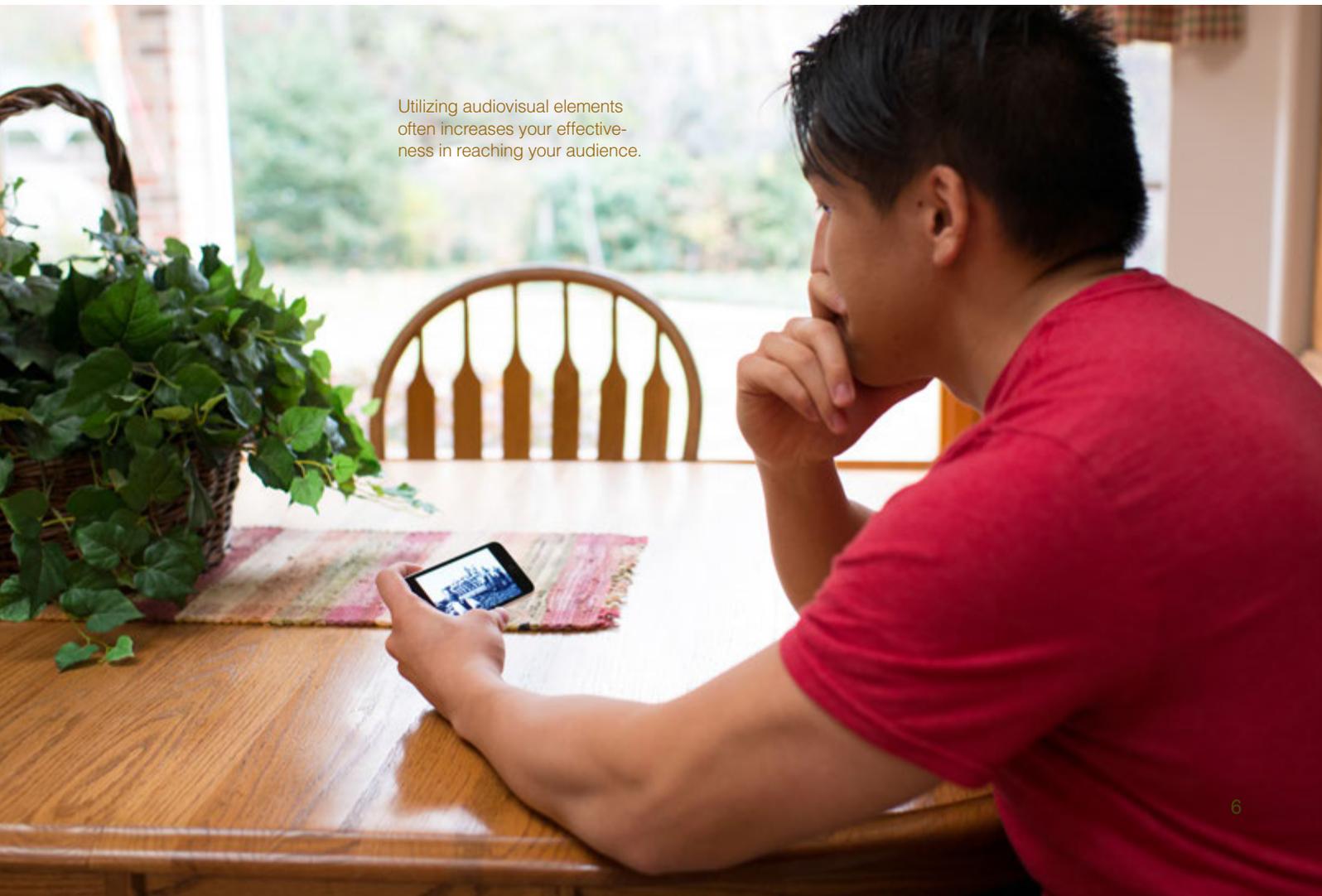
**Curriculum:** Local curriculum, such as a fifth-Sunday lesson, may be developed when approved by the Area Presidency and can be effective in reaching a member audience. Note that there are limited opportunities to share this type of content, and it can be difficult to produce and distribute.

## Using Audiovisual Material

Audiovisual elements often increase the effectiveness in reaching your audience. A video documentary, for example, communicates information beyond a narrative. Seeing people on the screen, including their facial expressions and the manner and pace with which they answer questions, adds another dimension to the story that is not captured in print. However, audiovisual resources can also limit your publication's reach. Viewing a video file, for example, requires an Internet connection with good bandwidth. Your area's publishing services manager can help you produce excellent audiovisual products.



A video documentary communicates information beyond a written narrative.



Utilizing audiovisual elements often increases your effectiveness in reaching your audience.



# Finding Stories to Share

**E**LDER MARLIN K. JENSEN, Church Historian and Recorder from 2005 to 2012, said, “History in its most basic form is a record of people and their lives, and from those lives come stories and lessons that can reinforce what we believe, what we stand for, and what we should do in the face of adversity. Not all of the stories that make up our history are of the epic nature of Joseph Smith’s First Vision or of Wilford Woodruff’s mission to England. In fact, some truly remarkable stories come from the lives of very ordinary Latter-day Saints, which most of us are” (“Stand in the Sacred Grove” [Church Educational System devotional, May 6, 2012]; [lds.org/broadcasts](https://lds.org/broadcasts)).





Shot from the Church history video, *"This Grand Opportunity: Elizabeth McCune and the First Sister Missionaries."*

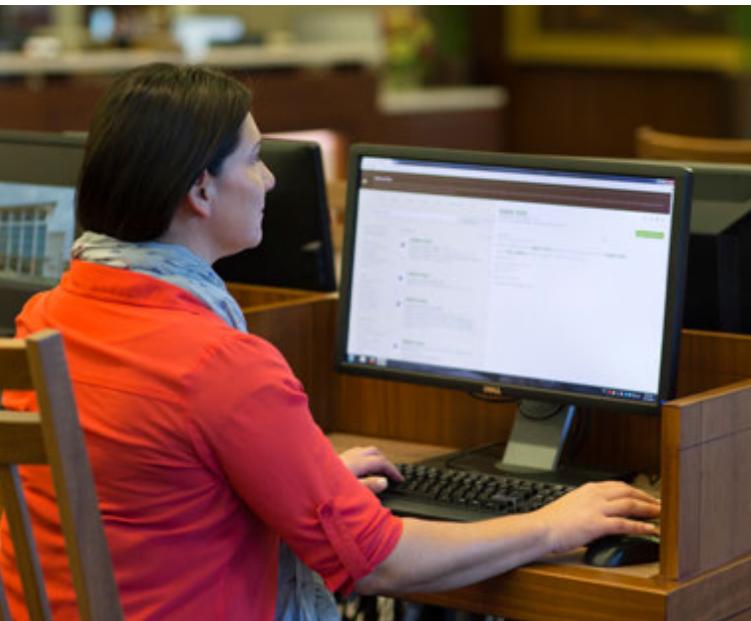
Stories can be an effective method for sharing history. When sharing history, use accounts that illustrate an episode or event. Select stories that align closely with the purpose of your publishing project. For instance, if your purpose is to help the youth in your area see the value of serving a mission, you may want to share two or three real-life experiences about how young men and young women chose to serve missions, the challenges they faced, their reliance on the Lord, and the blessings they received from their service. Most can relate to these stories and are inspired to apply these lessons in their own lives as they encounter adversity.

As you gather stories, select those that include life experiences that your audience will relate to. Even the small details from a person's life can often create a human connection that allows

your audience to more fully understand and sympathize with an individual's faith, personality, and challenges. For instance, understanding what made a decision difficult for a young man or young woman in 1925 may help a modern reader see his or her own challenges with a new perspective.

It is also important to verify that the stories you use are an accurate account of real events. Over time, people can forget specific details or can embellish certain elements of a story. Be aware that the Spirit cannot testify to folklore, rumor, or inaccurate information. Always be sure to authenticate your stories, regardless of how popular they have become.

(Left) Including even the small details from a person's life can often create a human connection that allows your audience to more fully understand and sympathize with an individual's faith, personality, and challenges.



Records containing appropriate Church history stories can often be found by searching the Church History Library catalog.

## Gathering Stories through Research and Interviews

Records containing appropriate Church history stories can often be found by searching the Church History Library catalog found at [churchhistorylibrary.lds.org](http://churchhistorylibrary.lds.org). Potential stories may be found in oral history interviews; annual histories from stakes, districts, and missions; and autobiographies, journals, and correspondence.

If you are unable to find a story with a theme you are seeking, try clicking **Ask Us** on the Church History Library page at [churchhistorylibrary.lds.org](http://churchhistorylibrary.lds.org), or discuss your project with your area Church history adviser or your contact at the Church History Department.

Another strategy for finding good stories is to record an oral history. An interview with the right person can provide valuable insight into an event or situation. See *Church History Guide: Oral Histories* for further instructions.

## Sources

To make sure your history includes the best and most accurate information available, you need to understand the different types of historical sources. A primary source is a document or item that gives a first-person account of a specific time period or event—that is, it was created by someone who was there when something happened. Examples include journals, letters, meeting minutes, oral history interviews, autobiographies, and reminiscences. Generally, records created near the time an event took place are more reliable than records created later. In addition, the more familiar the record creator was with the experience, the more reliable the information is likely to be.

A secondary source is a record created by a second or third party that describes, analyzes, or interprets an event or time period, sometimes based on primary sources. Secondary sources are often found in published form and may include published histories, textbooks, magazines, and documentaries.

News reports may present both primary and secondary sources. They may include first-person accounts of a specific time period or events from a news reporter's interview. However, news reports also include editorials that interpret an event or time period.

Secondary sources are often found in published form and may include published histories, textbooks, magazines, and documentaries.





## Primary and Secondary Source Citation Examples

### Primary

“Registro Histórico da Igreja em Manaus—AM,” (Historical Record of the Church in Manaus, Amazonas), original in records preservation center, Brazil Area office, São Paulo, Brazil.

### Secondary

Roger P. Minert, *Under the Gun: West German and Austrian Saints during World War II* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 145.

Whenever possible, use primary sources when crafting your history. Secondary sources are useful to obtain additional perspectives and context, but they may get facts wrong or interpret them in a biased way. When available, primary sources created by eyewitnesses during or shortly after an event provide the best foundation. For example, a journal entry written in 1956 by a labor missionary working on the Hamilton New Zealand Temple is a more reliable source than an account written by the missionary’s son in 2010. In addition, oral history interviews are important sources for perspective and emotion, but can be subject to error because memories fade and perspectives change over time. To the extent possible, verify the details of a story by using more than one primary source.

When writing a history, list all sources that you have used, including author, title, type of material, repository where material is located, and publication information for published sources. Providing such information, usually in endnotes, ensures that others can find your sources and brings credibility to your work.

In addition to using proper citations, a bibliography will also help the reader quickly find the information you consulted and cited.

When writing a history, list all sources that you have used, including author, title, type of material, repository where material is located, and publication information for published sources.



# Writing History

**O**NCE YOU HAVE GATHERED your sources, you are ready to begin the writing process. In some cases, you may be working on your own or in a small group. In other cases, you may be working with a large committee and receive assistance from Church departments. Whatever the case, you should follow an organized writing process with frequent checks to make sure you are on course.



## Selecting, Ordering, and Drafting

Your research will make you an expert on the story, but avoid the temptation to write about every detail you have discovered. The role of a writer is to accomplish the project's purpose. This can best be done by focusing on key, representative details that will help a reader connect to the most important parts of the story. Let your sources guide your interpretation, and try not to let your biases influence your conclusions. Guard against what is called "presentism"—judging a past culture and time through your own cultural lens.

**Outline Details:** You may want to begin by writing a list of details that capture the story you want to tell. Are there details you can cross off your list and still keep the core of the story? Are there important elements missing that would help the reader understand the larger story or place it in its proper context?

**Create an Outline:** Once you have recorded the basic details, consider the order you want to use to introduce details to the reader. Are there certain details or questions that you want to start with to catch your reader's interest? Does your story have a clear beginning, middle, and end? It may be useful to create an outline and share it with others. Refine the outline before writing a full draft.

**Create Multiple Drafts:** When you complete your outline, write a text. Follow your outline, but understand that outlines can be fluid and change as further research is conducted. Use clear and concise language to avoid confusion or misunderstanding. When working in a group, you might assign different tasks to different people, but be sure one person is ultimately responsible for making all the parts fit together. You will undoubtedly write numerous drafts as you review your work and receive feedback from others.

(Left) Let your sources guide your interpretation, and try not to let your biases influence your conclusions.



The perspective of other reviewers on issues of style and substance will inevitably help you produce a better history.

**Editing and Feedback:** The best way to ensure that you have produced the finest writing possible is by allowing others to review your drafts. The perspective of other reviewers on issues of style and substance will help you produce a better history. Invite others who have writing experience, production skills, and expertise on your topic to review your work. Seek feedback from leaders, and others, and try to anticipate how the publication will impact your audience. It is best to view the product as a team effort, with other reviewers helping you improve the product. While sometimes it is hard to expose your work to the eyes of others, it is important to understand that reviewers want you to succeed in publishing the best history possible. It is far better to catch errors before publication by using reviewers than to have those errors appear in print. A good editor will also clean up the grammar and style, ensuring that your work is a meaningful addition to existing scholarship.



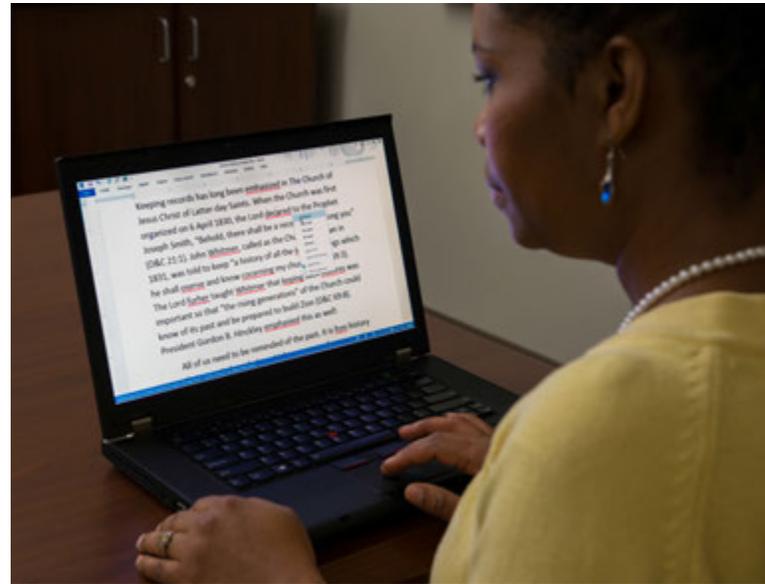
## Editing Resources

**Dictionary and Thesaurus:** Whether you access it online or in print, a reputable dictionary and thesaurus will help you in your writing. In English, both are available at the Merriam-Webster website, merriam-webster.com.

**Spell-Check:** Although they are never perfect, spelling and grammar tools that are built into your word processor can help you identify and correct many basic errors in your writing; however, do not rely on them solely.

**Style Guides:** Style guides address common questions related to grammar, usage, punctuation, word choice, and capitalization. The Church has a style guide for its publications, which your area’s publishing services manager can help you obtain. Other examples of style guides in English are the *Chicago Manual of Style* and the *AP Stylebook*, which can be accessed through the Internet.

Ask others for assistance with editing.



Although never perfect, spelling and grammar tools that are built into your word processor can be effective in identifying and correcting many basic errors that may be found in your writing.

**Other Languages:** Microsoft maintains style guides for many languages that can also be accessed through the Internet. Search “Microsoft Style Guides” online, and then select the desired language from the drop-down menu.

Your publishing services manager may be able to help you find other language-specific resources and writing aids.

## Synthesis versus Plagiarism

It is critically important that the interpretation and conclusions in your history are written in your own words, using your own ideas. As you examine various primary and secondary sources, you will become familiar with many aspects related to your story. As your understanding increases, you should be able to synthesize the story for your readers. You may, of course, use similar words and ideas found in the sources, but you should never use the words or ideas of other authors without placing their words in quotation marks or acknowledging their ideas and citing the source. Failure to acknowledge attribution, quote properly, and cite sources constitutes plagiarism, which is unethical and has potential legal consequences.



You should never use the words or ideas of other authors without placing their words in quotation marks or acknowledging their ideas and citing the source.



A bishop's interview is an example of something that takes place in a confidential setting.

## Sacred, Private, and Confidential Information

Some of the sources you use in writing your history may include sacred, confidential, or private information that is inappropriate for the Church to release to the public. Consequently, such information should not be included in a history. In addition, try to anticipate how current and future audiences will interpret the content.

If you have any doubts about whether information can or should be included in a history, please counsel with area leaders and your contact in the Global Support and Acquisition Division of the Church History Department.

The following basic definitions may be useful:

**Sacred:** Sacred information is specific information about temple rites and ceremonies or other sacred matters that has not been officially approved for release.

**Confidential:** Confidential information is information about the conduct of Church business that takes place in nonpublic settings.



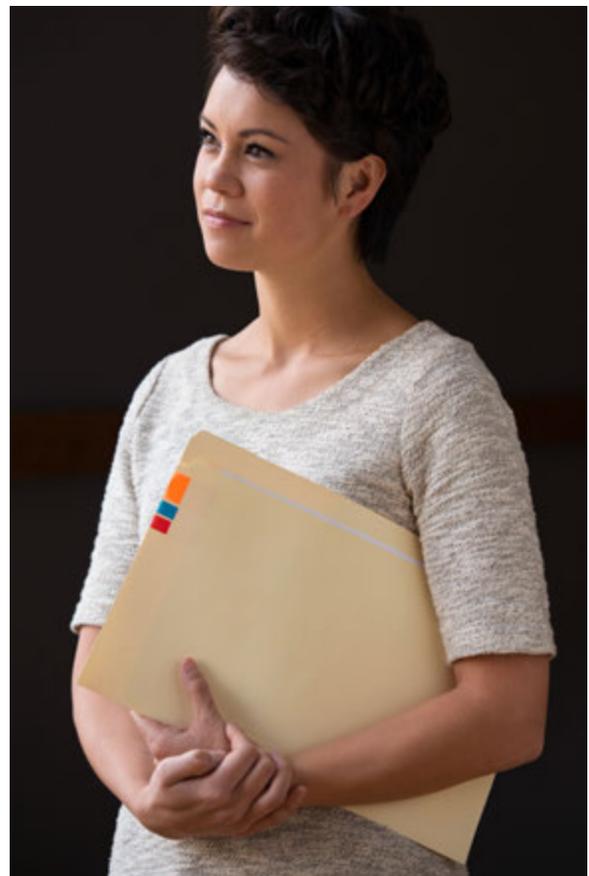
These records include, but are not limited to, financial records (including tithing and other donations, budgets, and expenditures), records pertaining to planning and policies, records about Church activities in countries where the Church is not legally recognized, and records of confessions and Church disciplinary proceedings.

**Private:** Private information is information that would violate applicable privacy laws if it were released (for example, personal contact information, government identification numbers, or personal financial or health information).

Confidential records are primarily found in official Church records and in privately created papers of General Authorities, Area Seventies, Church employees, local ecclesiastical leaders, clerks, and others holding positions of trust.



*Sacred* refers to specific information about temple rites and ceremonies or other sacred matters that have not been officially approved for release.



Health information is often protected by privacy laws.



# Sharing

**P**UBLISHING CHURCH HISTORY is accomplished most effectively when your ideas are aligned with the priorities set by the Area Presidency and when you collaborate with others. Working in alignment with area leaders is essential and qualifies you to receive assistance from the Spirit. Working collaboratively allows you to best use the expertise and resources of others.



## Plan Ahead

Publication projects are usually initiated when preparing the area's annual Church history plan. Be sure to discuss your ideas with the area's communication committee, because they are responsible for coordinating and approving all communication to members and the general public. Consult with this committee before submitting the annual area Church history plan. It is also important to include the area's publishing services manager in the planning process so he or she can help you accurately prepare a project budget. The publishing services manager may also be able to provide project management and other resources. Ultimately, the General Authority responsible for Church history in your area will review your annual Church history plan and give approval or ask for adjustments.

## Correlation

Publishing requires adherence to laws governing intellectual property rights and personal privacy. The Church has established a correlation process to ensure that these issues are properly addressed. The correlation process guarantees publications are consistent with Church doctrine and policies. It also increases the likelihood that challenging issues will be handled appropriately. All Church publications originating in the United States and Canada must follow the correlation process at Church headquarters. Outside the United States and Canada, the area's publishing services manager will help you understand and follow the correlation process.

## Translation

You may want to translate all or part of your publication into other languages. To reduce costs and expedite the process, consider translation issues when planning a project. The area's publishing services manager can assist with translation issues.

## Awareness

Well before your publication is finished, plan how to announce and advertise the product to a wide audience. Appropriate promotion will help ensure that your publication fulfills its purposes. You have a variety of tools available to you, such as social media, Church notices, and public announcements. Once again, the publishing services manager can help you prepare an awareness plan.



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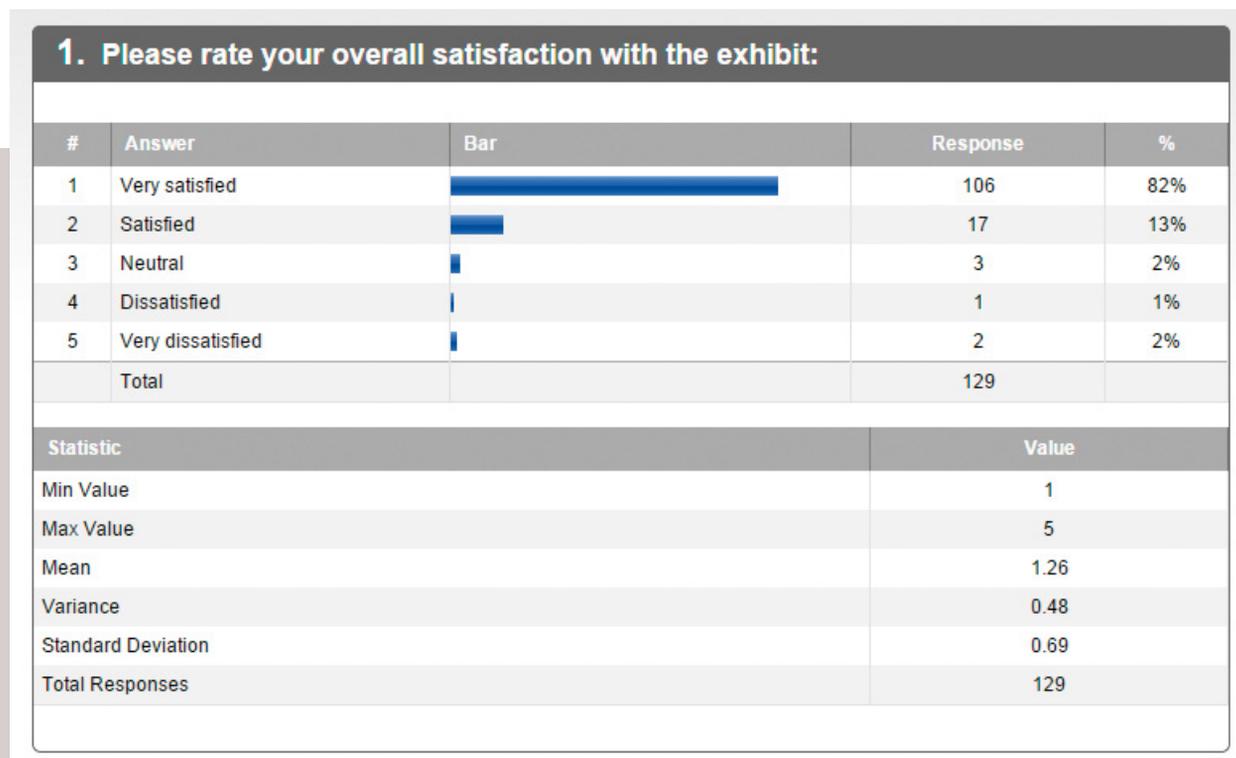
(Left) Sharing your publication can be done in many ways.

## Evaluate

It is important to learn from every publication effort so your next project will be more effective and efficient. Gathering information before, during, and after your publication launch can help you do this.. You may want to conduct a survey online or in person, hold focus groups, or gather standardized metrics such as number of online hits, books distributed, or people in attendance. You will also want to meet with your project team to discuss what went well and what should be improved in future projects.

## Archive

A copy of the publication should be given to the Church History Library at Church headquarters, and another copy should be stored in a records preservation center in your area.



It is important to learn from every publication effort so that your next project will be more effective and efficient.









THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS