

Suggestions for Writing a Timeline

A timeline is a list in chronological order of the significant formative events that happened to you personally and to the other significant people in your life. This includes things that occurred prior to your birth as well as those during your lifetime. These are the significant family events, births, deaths, moves, marriages, separations, divorces, etc., and such things as major illnesses, injuries, special vacations and trips, family battles, crimes, incarcerations, rescues, betrayals, disappointments, successes, failures, and incidents of abuse and molestation.

The paper is divided into columns as follows: Year, Age, Grade, Place(s), Person(s) and Event(s). Persons may be listed who were absent, if this was significant to you, e.g. "F was away in the Army". In the "Age" column, you can put a "B" by the year of your birth and number the following years consecutively for the age you became during that year. Repetitive, recurrent experiences can be listed at the time when they first began along with a time range such as "several times a week for 10 years". It is best to make entries on a computer or in pencil so that corrections can be made easily when this becomes necessary.

The purpose of the timeline is to give a quick overview of the events and the chronology. It is not for the purpose of describing things in detail. Therefore, abbreviations and brief words or phrases can be used as long as the meaning is clear. Events that are not listed initially can be added later when you recall them.

