

HOW TO

Write a Biography

Reformers: Women
Find a Voice

A **biography** is a story of a person's life. A biography can be written about anyone. You can learn a lot about history by writing a biography about someone who lived long ago. Biographies can make history come to life.

Think about how the lives of people change over time. The life of women in the United States today is different than it was 150 years ago. Today women have the same rights as men. Men and women can vote, go to school, and play sports. They can have the same jobs. It has not always been like this.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton
and child

In 1850, most men had the right to vote in the United States. In that year, no women were allowed to vote. In the early 1800s, some people were working to reform, or change, American life. You can learn about these changes by looking at the lives of some of these people.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was one woman who wanted to change the way women were treated. She helped to organize the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848.

If your assignment is to write a biography about Elizabeth Cady Stanton or another early woman reformer, you can follow the steps on the following pages.

STEPS IN Writing a Biography

1 Gather
Information

First you must collect information about your subject. You should find as many sources of information as possible.

To start, jot down questions you would like to answer.

What events affected this person's life? What difficulties did this person overcome? How did this person's work change history? Writing down questions before you begin will help guide you in looking for information.

Look in an encyclopedia, either in book form or on a CD-ROM.

Read the highlights of the person's life. Check with your librarian. Ask what other books or magazines to use. Try to find at least three different sources.

Keep notes.

Look for answers to your questions. Use the table of contents and index to locate important facts. Skim through a chapter to find key words. When you find useful information, read it carefully and take notes.

Use your own words when writing notes. If you copy a quote, make sure to use quotation marks. Also write down who said the quote.

Index cards are a good place to write notes. Write down where you read information. Include the title of the source, author, publisher, date of publication, and the page number. Also record a category that describes the notes on the index card. This will help you to organize your notes later.

Category

Notes

Source

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Birth and Early Childhood
 Born: November 12, 1815, in Johnstown, New York
 Father: Daniel Cady, a lawyer, legislator, and judge
 Mother: Margaret Cady, housewife, had six children
 Elizabeth's First Memory: When Elizabeth was about four, her sister Katherine was born. Elizabeth heard people telling her parents how sorry they must be that their new baby was another girl and not a boy.
 Source: Mildred Yunker, Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Crusader for Women's Rights, Dixon Publishers, 1998, page 6.