



*Teaching
Genealogists AI™*
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Getting Started in Genealogy

Module 2 – Talk to Living Relatives

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Organization: Puerto Rican Genealogy Group

Website: <https://puertoricangenealogy.org>

Date Created: 2026-02-17

Estimated Time: 30–45 minutes

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will:

- Understand why family interviews are essential to genealogical research
- Know how to prepare for and conduct a family interview
- Have a ready-to-use list of interview questions tailored for Puerto Rican families

- Understand how to record and organize what relatives tell you
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Why Talk to Relatives?

The people in your family who lived the history are your richest source of information – and they won't be here forever. A single conversation with an elderly aunt or uncle can reveal names, places, and stories that no document will ever contain.

Family interviews help you:

- **Fill in blanks** from Module 1 (names, dates, places you didn't know)
- **Discover migration stories** – when and why your family came to the mainland
- **Learn about the *pueblo*** – which town in Puerto Rico the family is from
- **Find documents** – relatives may have birth certificates, photos, prayer cards, or letters tucked away
- **Correct assumptions** – what you “always heard” may be different from what actually happened

Important: Don't wait. Start with the oldest living relatives. Every year that passes, memories and stories are lost.

Before the Interview

Who to Interview

Start with the people most likely to know family history:

- Parents and grandparents
- Older aunts and uncles (*tíos y tías*)
- Godparents (*padrinos y madrinas*) – often close family friends with their own memories
- Older cousins who may have heard stories from their parents
- Family friends from the old neighborhood

How to Set It Up

- **Ask permission.** “I'm trying to learn about our family history. Can I ask you some questions?”
- **Keep it casual.** A kitchen table conversation works better than a formal interview.
- **One person at a time** is ideal, but group conversations can spark memories too.
- **Phone or video calls** work if you can't visit in person.
- **Bring your Module 1 worksheet** so you can ask about specific blanks.

What to Bring

- A notebook or your phone for notes

- Your phone's voice recorder app (ask permission before recording)
 - Your Module 1 worksheet with the blanks you want to fill
 - Old photos, if you have any – photos trigger memories
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Interview Questions

You don't need to ask every question. Pick the ones that feel natural for your conversation. Let the person talk – follow their stories.

About the Family

- What are the full names of your parents? Your grandparents?
- Do you know where they were born? Which *pueblo* (town) in Puerto Rico?
- What *barrio* (neighborhood/sector) did they live in?
- How many brothers and sisters did they have? What were their names?
- Who were you named after? Do you know why?

About Migration

- When did our family come to the mainland United States?
- Who came first? Did others follow later?
- Where did they settle? (City, neighborhood)
- Why did they leave Puerto Rico? (Work, family, military, education)
- Did anyone go back to Puerto Rico? Did some stay?
- Did the family keep in contact with relatives on the island?

About Daily Life

- What did your parents/grandparents do for work?
- What church did the family attend? (*¿A qué iglesia iban?*)
- What holidays or traditions were important to the family?
- Were there family reunions? Where were they held?
- What language was spoken at home?

About Documents and Photos

- Do you have any old photos of family members? Can I see them?
- Do you have any birth certificates, marriage certificates, or baptism records?
- Are there any letters, prayer cards (*estampitas*), or newspaper clippings?
- Do you know if anyone kept a family Bible with names written in it?
- Are there any military records or discharge papers?

About Difficult Topics (Handle With Care)

Some questions may touch on sensitive subjects. Be respectful and let the person decide how much to share.

- Were there any family members who were not spoken about?

- Did anyone have a different father or mother than what was commonly known?
- Were there adoptions, or children raised by other relatives (*hijos de crianza*)?
- Did anyone change their name when they came to the mainland?

Tip: If a relative says “I don’t want to talk about that,” respect their decision. Note that the topic exists and move on. You may find the answer in records later.

During the Interview

- **Listen more than you talk.** Let them tell their story in their own words.
 - **Don’t correct them** even if you think a date or name is wrong. Write down exactly what they say. You can verify later with records.
 - **Ask follow-up questions.** “You mentioned Tío Pedro – what was his full name?” “Where exactly in Ponce was that?”
 - **Repeat names and places back** to make sure you heard correctly, especially if the person speaks with an accent or uses nicknames.
 - **Write it down immediately.** Don’t trust your memory. If you’re recording, also take notes on key points.
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After the Interview

Organize What You Learned

1. **Review your notes** the same day while the conversation is fresh.
2. **Update your Module 1 worksheet** with any new names, dates, or places.
3. **Mark what’s a fact vs. a family story.** Grandma saying “your grandfather was born in Utuado” is valuable information, but it needs to be confirmed with a record. Note it as: “*Per interview with [Name], [Date].*”
4. **List new questions** that came up. Each answer usually raises two more questions.
5. **Note who else to interview.** Did your relative mention someone who might know more?

Thank Your Relative

- A follow-up call or message thanking them goes a long way.
 - Share what you learn as your research progresses – it keeps them engaged and may trigger more memories.
 - Offer to share copies of old photos or documents you find.
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Your Turn: Plan Your First Interview

Answer these questions to prepare:

Who will you interview first?

How will you reach them? (in person / phone / video)

What are the 3 biggest blanks from your Module 1 worksheet?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What specific questions will you ask to fill those blanks?

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
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Reflection Questions

- Did any family stories surprise you or contradict what you thought you knew?
 - Did your relative mention a specific *pueblo* or *barrio*? That place name is your key to finding records.
 - Who else did they mention that you should talk to next?
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What's Next

In **Module 3 – Collect Basic Documents**, you'll learn what records to look for, where to find Puerto Rican records online for free, and how to read common Spanish terms on those documents.
