

Tips for Overcoming Fear of Research

By DiAnn Mills

1. Visit the area's chamber of commerce.
2. Take or download more pictures/videos than you think you'll ever use. *Remember, if online images are used beyond personal research purposes, use a site like [Pixabay](#) for royalty-free access. Confirm your usage is in line with their terms of service/licensing.
3. Interview people living in the area. For a historical setting, this also means reading diaries and journals. How has history affected the community?
4. Listen to how local people talk. Do they use a distinct vocabulary? Journal these distinctions. Ask permission to record dialogue for later playback.
5. What are the community's values and expectations for life and each other?
6. What is their diet? How much of their food supply is local?
7. What are the menus in the local restaurants?
8. What are the local hotels or motels?
9. How is the area governed?
10. What are the sources of entertainment?
11. How do the residents celebrate holidays?
12. Does the community have special festivals?
13. How does the area experience the seasons?
14. What are the medical concerns? What kind of medical care is available?
15. What kinds of homes do they live in?
16. Where do they shop?
17. How do the people dress?
18. Do the arts play a vital role in the community?
19. How do locals view education, sports teams, and favorite colleges?
20. How do the residents earn a living?
21. If the area is near a national or state park, look for research material in the visitors' section.
22. Discover the wildlife and birds of the region. Record the sounds.
23. Visit the local library. View newspaper archives.
24. What churches and other religious affiliations are in the area?
25. Is there a museum in the region that you can visit?
26. Does politics play a role?
27. Are there documentaries about the area?
28. What are the people's joys?
29. What do the people fear?

The following apps are time savers for the serious writer. I've listed them in alphabetical order.

Airline(s)

Does your character fly into or out of a distinct city? Does your book need specific flight times?

Evernote

An incredible tool that allows the user to create notes, photos, videos, websites, and more.

Facebook

Have you investigated Facebook pages and groups about the researched area?

Instagram

A picture or reel shows an area, the people, culture, language, and details that an online search may not reveal.

Maps

Sometimes a writer uses real places or locations, and other times fictitious names work best. Determine the miles or length of time to travel from one setting to another.

News

Check the latest news for insight into an area and its community. If an area has a local news station, a writer can learn much about the culture and its priorities.

PictureThis

This is one of my favorite tools. The user snaps a pic of a plant or tree and learns the name and care information. Be sure to visit the area in the same season as the book's setting for accuracy.

WeatherBug

A character may be entering an area never visited previously or has unpredictable weather. This app helps the writer determine how nature may or may not cooperate with the character.