

Writing Your Personal Story

Your personal story is the central part of your refugee claim. Your story will help us at ORAM understand and explain who you are, why you left your country and why you need refugee protection. To do this, we will need you to lead us through your life story as an LGBT person.

A refugee claim is built on many facts and details, some of which are very personal and painful, and most of which only you know about yourself. Many of these details are difficult to recall accurately, and others are painful or difficult to convey to another person – even to a trusted lawyer.

Most of us who are LGBT are filled with painful memories. We spend a lot of time trying to make sense of a hostile world that misunderstands us, rejects us and mistreats us. We at ORAM ask for your trust, in sharing with us some of those experiences and thoughts, so that we can better assist you.

This guide will help you focus on certain facts and details which may be important to your case. Please take time to read this carefully. It will be key in helping your case worker through your life and your claim in the best possible way.

What you write is **absolutely confidential** and will not be shared with anyone except your case worker and an attorney-supervisor. Also, if there is something you don't want to write but would prefer to **talk about it in person**, please indicate it in your written story and your case worker will follow up with you.

A condition to our being able to help you is that you must tell us the absolute truth. Do not exaggerate, embellish or invent any fact or detail. If you do not know or recall an important detail, please say so. It's also very important to not leave out any important facts or details.

The following general guidelines should guide your story, no matter what you write about:

1. Write in **English**. If you're not confident in English, write in your native language and ask a friend to translate it for you later into English. If you proceed in this way but your story contains facts you don't want anyone to see, write those parts separately and talk to us.
2. We will need your story in **electronic form (typed)**.
3. Please write your story **chronologically** (as it occurred in time) from the earliest time you can remember to the most recent. If you recall it, include the exact **date, time and place**.
4. It's much **better to write too much** than too little. If you write too much or you write something we believe isn't relevant to your claim, we'll omit it.
5. Write in a **quiet, secluded place** where others cannot disturb you or see your computer screen.
6. After you write a section **return to it the following day** to make sure it's clear and understandable.
7. Do not worry about style, grammar or spelling. **Focus on the contents of your story.**
8. Focus on what happened to you. **What did you experience, see, do and feel?**
9. **Please take a few days.** None of us can write our entire life story in one sitting.
10. Please be as detailed as possible, but keep in mind **UNHCR needs no details or evidence of sexual encounters.**

PLEASE PROCEED TO READ PAGE 2

Now that you've read the general guidelines and you're sitting down to write, keep in mind we are looking for events in your life which ***focus on your sexual orientation or your gender identity***. But if you have been mistreated for ***other reasons***, we need to know those too.

As you write, consider events and incidents involving your ***social, family, work, school and community life as well as your thoughts and feelings***.

Following are some questions and areas to get you started:

1. What are your memories of ***understanding that you were different*** from others in terms of your sexual orientation, gender identity or in any other way? Please describe these in detail.
2. Do you recall any ***difficulties*** because you were different? What were they?
3. Did you ever suffer any ***verbal or physical mistreatment*** because of your sexual orientation or your gender identity? Please describe these in detail.
4. How does ***your family*** behave around your sexual orientation or your gender identity?
5. How did your ***schoolmates, neighbors or others*** behave around your sexual orientation or your gender identity?
6. Have you ever been ***sexually abused***? If so, who abused you? When?
7. Have you ever been ***threatened or blackmailed*** because of your sexual orientation or your gender identity?
8. Have you had any other problems with members of the ***community, religious leaders or others***?
9. If you were abused or mistreated for ***any reason(s) other than your sexual orientation or gender identity***, please describe these.
10. What are the difficulties you have had in Turkey (if any), because of ***your sexual orientation or gender identity***?