Successfully completing a good quality Form F Assessment takes time to develop and perfect. They require in depth information gathering skills, an ability to analyse data and, ultimately, make a professional judgement as to whether the applicants should be approved as foster carers. I have put together a few tips which I hope you will find useful when approaching your first assessment:

**Request a Good Practice Example**

It is important that you are fully aware of the organisations expectations and are clued up on what your agency considers to be best practice. You need to be familiar with their Form F template, assessment procedures and accompanying documentation before undertaking any assessment.

**Use Available Textbook Toolkits**

There has been some excellent guidance on completing Form F assessments published in recent years. Roger Chapman’s *Undertaking a Fostering Assessment in England: A Guide to Collecting and Analysing Information for Form F* (2016) book is an essential tool for any social worker new to Form F assessing. Other useful books include *Safer Caring: A New Approach* by Jacky Slade (2012) and *Dogs and Pets in Fostering and Adoption* by Paul Adams (2015).

**Learn from Serious Case Reviews**

Serious case reviews are very informative and I would suggest that you incorporate any relevant learning points into your work. I would highly recommend that you read the recent serious case review on ‘Claire’ which is currently available on the Croydon Safeguarding Children’s Board website.
Structure your Assessment Sensibly
As you become a more experienced assessor, you will find an assessment structure that works for you. Every assessment will differ depending on the applicants’ circumstances but try to follow a similar pattern to maintain consistency and a flowing journey through the assessment. Consider referring to Roger Chapmans’ book to assist you with your questioning style and use additional exercises to inform your analysis.

Set Homework
We all find it difficult to talk about ourselves and I certainly couldn’t tell you what I have learnt from my childhood without having time to think and reflect on the question. Give the applicants time to consider and respond to complex questions by setting these as homework, which can then be further explored during your next visit. It will also act as additional evidence of the applicants desire to actively engage with the assessment process.

Develop a Resource Library
There are many worthwhile tools available that you can use to assist with identifying the applicants’ suitability. Consider using case scenarios, Adult Attachment interviews, Secure Base interviews, pen pictures, wishes and feelings worksheets, and personal value assessments. Don’t be afraid to create your own templates and resources.

Keep on Top of References
It is always useful to create a crib sheet to help you keep on top of what references have been initiated, actioned and returned to your organisation. Developing a spreadsheet relating to each assessment may prove very helpful when monitoring progress and ensuring deadlines are met.

Check in with your Assessment Manager
Touching base with your assessment manager and ensuring you receive the appropriate supervision is extremely important. Having a second opinion and a fresh pair of eyes on an assessment is highly beneficial. They are there to provide advice, guidance and quality assurance – use them!

Do not Overstretch Yourself
Be mindful that taking on numerous Form F assessments at the same time could muddle your thinking. Pace yourself and be aware of your own limitations. Will you be able to comfortably meet the organisation’s assessment deadlines?

Could you Stand by your Assessment?
Overall, the best advice I could give anyone embarking on a Form F assessment is to bear in mind that one day you could be called to court as a result of this foster carers conduct. Is your assessment reliable, relevant and robust?