



your guide to **WRITING YOUR MEMOIR**

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A QUICK REFERENCE TO WRITING YOUR MEMOIR

Introduction

Whether your memories warrant a bestselling book or a thoughtful legacy to your grandchildren, writing a memoir can seem like a great idea that quickly becomes a daunting task. This guide will help you navigate the project and provide structure that will assist you in writing your memoir.

Memoirs vs. Autobiographies

Memoirs are different from autobiographies. Traditionally, memoirs were written by politicians or celebrities in order to document events or share a particular aspect of one's life. In contrast, autobiographies are more researched and include dates and events in a chronological order. Today, the definitions are blurred. Many people who are not well known write memoirs that share events of their lives. However, memoirs remain primarily about an aspect or episode of one's life rather than the whole story. Memoir writing is about how you became the person you are.

Types of Memoirs

A memoir doesn't have to be a book. There are a variety of formats you can use. You can create a video memoir for the price of a digital video camera. Ask a relative or friend to interview you.

Workbook-style books simplify the process with prompts to help you to fill in pertinent information. Some focus on recording dates and events. Others prompt for opinions on politics or life stages. A workbook memoir can be a springboard to help you write your story in book form.

Scrapbooks can also be memoirs. Simply compile photos, invitations, news clippings and other documents to share the highlights of your life. Any of these forms can be a first step to a more comprehensive memoir as well.

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SIMPLE STEPS TO WRITING YOUR MEMOIR

STEP 1 – Determine a Theme

What To Think About

We all live unique lives and some are more interesting than others. But any story is more appreciated when readers can relate to elements of the work in a special way. Like a good novel, a memoir should focus on a theme that others can relate to and will make your story more cohesive.

What to Do

Choose your theme. When you determine a theme, you'll find it easier to make the work cohesive. Consider these possibilities:

Ancestry/Ethnicity: Document your family tree with special attention to the characteristics of your heritage. You can draw on your race or nationality to frame your story.

Confession: Is there something you've done that you want to get off your chest? Will your revelation help others?

History: Let an historical event be the context in which you tell your story. What was your life like when Kennedy was assassinated? When men first walked on the moon? Where were you on 9/11?

Life Stage: Focus on a period in life that presented unique challenges or a time when you dealt with life in a different way.

Location/Travel: Did you live overseas? Travel to an exotic place? Do you have connections to a geographic area?

Occupation: Is there a message concerning a type of work you've done? Can you offer a behind-the-scenes look at a particular job? How did the work affect you?

Physical/Psychological Issues: Do you have a disability? Have you managed depression? Helped another person with trauma or addiction?

Popular Interest: Were you or a spouse in a war? Did you work with a famous person? Do you have a unique perspective on alternative lifestyles, the environment or politics?

Relationships: Did you have a stormy relationship with a parent? A great love story? Has a child affected your life?

Religion/Philosophy: Emphasize how religion or belief system inspired your journey, held you back or transformed your life.

Thrill: Focus on a war experience, a near-death trauma, crime or travel adventure.

STEP 2 – Ask Questions

What To Think About

Starting with your theme, think about what experiences, challenges and relationships were pivotal to shaping you. Conduct an interview with yourself.

What to Do

Begin to write about your experiences. Don't worry about chronological order, grammar or spelling mistakes. Here are some questions to start the conversation:

- Describe your greatest challenges and how you overcame them?
- Describe your parents and upbringing.
- What would you do over? Why? What would you do differently?
- Who was your greatest love? How did he/she affect you?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- Who was a big influence in your life? How would your life be different?
- Have you traveled? To where? Why or why not?
- What has life taught you? What events imparted those lessons?
- What are your views on religion, politics, values, etc? How did they change over the years? What changed your views?
- Is there a secret to being happy?
- How do the answers to these questions relate to your theme?

STEP 3 – Plan a Schedule

What To Think About

The most challenging part of creating your memoir is simply sitting down and doing it! There are several steps you need to take before you actually begin writing—and planning time for those as well as for writing can make the process less challenging and more fun.

What to Do

Commit time to each task. Whether you're creating an outline or writing a page each day, in a year, you'll have accomplished a lot of writing and possibly a book.

If writing is a new activity for you, you might become more comfortable if you don't think about writing your memoir. Just sit down and write about anything, but do it according to your designated schedule. The exercise and discipline can inspire you to tell your story.

STEP 4 – Be Creative

What To Think About

You can enhance your theme with a creative twist. Don't be afraid to bring an original approach to your manuscript.

What to Do

Include correspondence and photos. Consider including news clippings from the dates in your memoir. Start each chapter with the lyrics from a popular tune that relates to the time period.

These are simply a few ideas you can use to elevate your memoir with originality and make your story more memorable to your readers.

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SIMPLE STEPS TO WRITING YOUR MEMOIR (CONTINUED)

STEP 5 – Be Courageous, Real

What To Think About

While a memoir sometimes begins with pride, you may uncover a range of emotions, which can be challenging. An honest memoir forces you to confront your biggest mistakes, conflicts, embarrassing moments and flaws. Through the writing process, you explore who you are, which invites growth and reflection. If you accept that you're a human being and show yourself compassion and forgiveness, the process is easier. If you try to justify your actions, your story will be self-serving and won't resonate with readers. If you're not honest, write fiction.

What to Do

Step back from your emotions to be sure your writing is not only accurate, but also portrays the truth. It can help to think of the events in your life as if they happened to someone else—then make them personal. You'll have a fresh perspective. While scary at first, being "real" is ultimately a cleansing, illuminating experience. It's a way to make sense of life.

STEP 6 – Organize & Outline

What To Think About

It can be helpful to create a structure and then fill in the information. Organizing the facts up front, makes the editing process easier.

What to Do

List the events that spring from your theme. These may be your chapters. Fill in each sub-point with more details. Make these points relate back to the central theme.

STEP 7 – Use a Turning Point

What To Think About

A moment when you made an important choice or a dramatic event will grab reader's attention and help to build interest in your story.

What to Do

Write about a turning point that relates to your theme. Consider starting your memoir from that point.

STEP 8 – Write a 1st Draft

What To Think About

Don't let a quest for the perfect manuscript inhibit productivity. Your first draft should be a "brain-dump" with little attention to perfect grammar or accuracy. Not only will you be able to produce the basic story more quickly, you'll be more motivated to finish. It's like dieting. If you see results, you're motivated to reach your goal. This freedom comes with a price: commitment to edit your manuscript later—perhaps many times.

What to Do

Keep your writing schedule and simply write—as if no one will ever see your manuscript. Sometimes it's helpful to tell others when you expect to finish your work. Notice what activities motivate you to continue and where you encounter delays.

A writing workshop can help you hone your writing skills and adhere to a writing schedule. Many libraries, universities and community organizations offer such workshops.

STEP 9 – Write Well

What To Think About

The facts give your story structure. The details give it flavor. These details are the gems that readers will appreciate.

What to Do

Draw on your senses to paint a picture of time and place that your reader can imagine. What music is on the radio? What kind of car are you driving? What does the setting look like? What textures can you feel? What are the people doing? Talking about? Feeling? Use photos to jar your memory. Engage readers with dialogue, which gives your "characters" their own personality.

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SIMPLE STEPS TO WRITING YOUR MEMOIR (CONTINUED)

Step 10 – Walk Away

What To Think About

You need time to step back from your manuscript before reviewing it so you gain a fresh perspective.

What to Do

When you've finished your first draft, don't look at it for a few days before you read it again with a more critical eye.

Step 11 – Review & Edit

What To Think About

It's not unusual for an author to rewrite 5 to 15 revisions before feeling satisfied. Every writer makes grammar errors. Every writer's manuscript can be richer and more meaningful.

What to Do

Look at each word and be sure you've said exactly what you meant to say. Edit the language to hold interest. Then look at how your sentences flow and be sure your story makes sense. Check your manuscript for accuracy. Easy-to-use software programs can help you proof for grammar and punctuation errors.

Step 12 – Protect Yourself

What To Think About

Some writers believe that if a work doesn't make some people angry, it's not saying anything important. Likewise, your memoir may include the less-than-perfect actions of others or traumatic events. Think about who might read your book and how people in your book are portrayed.

What to Do

Before you share your first draft, protect yourself legally and emotionally. If your story is explosive, consider an autobiographical novel, which allows you to tell your story—with names and identifying details changed—so you're not vulnerable to lawsuits. It may also help to prepare friends and family by sharing the story beforehand and your reasons for writing it.

Step 13 – Accept Feedback

What To Think About

It's very difficult to write a cohesive, clear story the first time around. It can be helpful to have a neutral person read your manuscript.

What to Do

Ask a friend for feedback. Ask if parts of your story are tedious or slow. Does your reader understand the sequence of events? Are the ideas clear? Accept feedback graciously, then decide if it is valid. If the comments warrant additional edits, go back to Step 11.

Step 14 – Let Go

What To Think About

Perfection never contributes to completion. Don't let the delusion of achieving perfection block your success! Writing isn't an exact science. There's no perfect way to tell your story.

What to Do

After you've done everything to make your manuscript the best it can be, let go. If you're considering getting your work published, send it to publishers. You can also consider self-publishing through many online print-on-demand publishers or simply making your own copies for distribution to family members. Feel the satisfaction that comes with sharing your life with others.

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THE WISE PLANNING SYSTEM

Whether you are planning ahead or making arrangements for an immediate funeral, our Wise Planning System can help you every step of the way.

STEP 1 – QUICK PLAN

Get started with a basic plan and see an estimate of your expected costs. It's quick, easy and free.

STEP 2 – ESSENTIALS PLAN

This Free Upgrade takes your planning to the next level. Manage your expected costs in detail. Search for and select providers, advisors and products in our online directories.

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The ultimate funeral planner. Assign trustees for your plan, design your ceremonies, record vital

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