

How to Write an Autobiography...



Biographies are written stories of a person's life that were written by someone else, while an Autobiography is a person's story written by themselves

Biographers generally rely on a wide variety of documents and viewpoints; an autobiography, however, may be based entirely on the writer's memory. Closely associated with autobiography (and sometimes difficult to precisely distinguish from it) is the form of memoir.

You do not have to be famous or someone of importance to write an autobiography. It is said that everyone has a story to tell about one's life and times, sadly countless millions of people will pass over and their life story will be forgotten forever within the sands of time.

Whilst technology in the 21st century has the means, byway of the Information super highway The Internet, stored for future generation's personal thoughts of one's own life experiences.

See: www.autobiographyof.me

Our personal Lives can be full of highs and lows, good times and bad, sad periods and happy times. We all experience them throughout our short time on this planet, whereas history can shape our future. Therefore our vision of these precious moments can be preserved and documented for future generations.



The word autobiography was first used deprecatingly by William Taylor in 1797 in the English periodical the Monthly Review, when he suggested the word as a hybrid but condemned it as 'pedantic'; but its next recorded use was in its present sense by Robert Southey in 1809. The form of autobiography however goes back to early A.D. 400 when an intellectual Christian leader, Saint Augustine, wrote his own.

." An autobiography is information about one's own life written by that one person. In it, it tells what that person's life is all about."



St. Augustine
as painted by the Italian painter Sandro Botticelli in 1480

Aurelius Augustinus was born at Tagaste (Tajelt), a town of Numidia, on the 13th of November 354 A.D. One of the early Christians



How to Write an Autobiography.....

When writing an autobiography, you focus on five major parts of your life:

- How life began,
- What life means to you,
- Your life experience and where you are in life,
- What your outlook and future is on life
- And finally your life conclusions.

Your autobiography could spread over numerous pages or just a few. Including photos and memorabilia. ([See H G Wells](#))

Before contemplating your own autobiography a few questions you need to consider!

Do you want to leave a message to future generations?

Do you want to pass on your heritage / legacy?

Do you want to put closure to a period or episode?

Do you want to share your experiences?

Do you want to preserve family history?

And mostly: Do you want to share what and who you are?



Why do you want to write the story of your life?

Every person has an interesting story to tell and writing your autobiography is a great way to share it with people and future generations.

But why do you want to do it?

This is the first question you will need to ask yourself before you actually sit down to write an autobiography.

What is your motivation for writing your biography?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I interested in passing on my family history to future generations?
- Am I recording my personal history?
- Is it my work history?
- Is it my community work?
- Is it my personal values and philosophies?
- Is it when I underwent a personal transformation?
- What is it I really want to share?

Time spent pondering this and clarifying your purpose will give you the motivation and focus that is necessary to see through your autobiographical project to completion.

All of the above are great reasons for writing an autobiography and certainly your own reasons will be personal to you. The reason you embark on, what can be a very rewarding but time consuming project, is what will provide you with the motivation to keep going and finish it.



Deciding on an Autobiographical Style

There are many different ways to tell your story and once you have your structure you can get started.

What point of view are you going to use in telling your story?

Are you going to tell your story in the first person or from the viewpoint of another person?

Many autobiographies are told from the teller's (your) unique perspective. After all it is your experiences you are writing about. It's the most common approach if you are doing the actual writing.



Structure and Getting Started

Once you have decided your reasons for writing down your personal memoirs you are going to be writing a lot of things down. This is where just spending time thinking about things and jotting them down into a notebook will help you build the structure of your personal memoir, your autobiography.

The emphasis you place on the various areas of your life will be different from another person embarking on their own autobiography.

Organise Your Memoirs into a Structure

Even though you may not decide to tell your personal memoir chronologically this is probably a good place to start. Get yourself a notebook and go through your list rewriting your notes and organising them into a chronological order. This is a good time to think about any

facts you might want to check. To think about anybody you may want to confer with to clarify information.

You may also want to jot down a note for the really important things to search out, any photos or documents you might have that will illustrate the important parts of your story. Another thing to go on your conferring list is that others, friends and family, may well have that special document or photo you would like to use. You will need to ask them whether you can use it and/or get permission from the photo's copyright holder.

This is a good time to start to pull together your lists so that you are matching up people, place and events on the one list. You will probably find that you will think of more as you go through this process.

Once you have pulled all your notes together you will have a very comprehensive short hand note of your autobiography and the daunting task is once again becoming more manageable again.



(1) How your life began

The first things you do when writing an autobiography is start off with a lot of facts about your life; for example, your name and your parents name, where they came from including their family history, when and where you were born, where you lived, where you spent your childhood, where you went to school. Your early influences in your young life, you have to give a lot of information so people who read it can clearly understand your beginning.

Focus

You have organised everything chronologically, your lists of events, characters and places.

Organising your thoughts chronologically does give you an outline structure to work with and does act as an important “memory jogger” but there is nothing to say that you have to tell your story this way.

Are you telling your whole life story, an autobiography, or are you telling a memoir concentrating on a particular theme or collection of themes or a specific time and series of events?

You can present your story and tell it in many different ways and you can start where you want to start. It is common for writers to just start writing about a particular event, person or place and then jump to a completely different one unrelated by time.

If you find that your mind leaps to a particular theme, event or time then start there and just write. This will inspire and motivate you to continue. Pick a subject and write about it and when you have finished writing this portion you can take a deep breath and admire what you have achieved!

Then pick another subject. Often when writing your first section you will be inspired for the next, by all means jot those down as you write and come back to them later.

You will have a lot of notebooks by the time you have finished. *Perhaps you will even discover another complete story you want to write.*

Once you have written the introduction, you are ready to start your second Chapter of your autobiography



(2) What life means to you?

In this chapter you should state how you see life--what does life mean to you.

- Are you happy or sad?
- Do you have a lot of friends or just a few?
- How do you make your days go by?
- Do you have a relationship?

- What are your favourite places to go on?

Reading through your outline structure certain themes will emerge. These may be family, love, love lost, perseverance, adventure, achievements, work, travel that type of thing.

Perhaps one is obviously dominant; you are almost certainly going to have more than one threaded through your outline structure. You might need to explore some of the events and experiences in a little more depth to uncover their underlying theme.

To enhance the readability of your autobiography and increase the enjoyment for your reader you should employ an over arching or umbrella theme. What that actual theme actually is depends on your motivation for writing your story and the events, experiences and interactions with the people you meet along the way.

It's important to find your underlying theme for the main message you want to convey in your story. Unless you are very firm in the message you want to convey at the outset and are writing specifically to convey that message, you may find that your key theme changes during the writing process. This happens as you indulge yourself deeper into your own story and rediscover events and purposes with significant meaning for you.



(3) Your life experience and where you are in life?

When you are writing this part of the autobiography, you usually explain the type of person you are; use facts about yourself such as:

Have you won any awards?

Did you achieve anything?

State any changes throughout your life!

Remembering any events in your life!

Your personal and family experiences!

Events and Experiences

Jot down as many events and life experiences about your life as you can think of.

Keep your note book handy so that when you think of something it is there for you. A few words will do the trick, this is your “memory trigger” they don’t have to be complete sentences or even fully detailed.

- Maybe it is something about one of the places you lived in?
- Something you remember about a favourite uncle or aunt.
- Perhaps it’s about when you saw something in the big city or the birth of a child.
- You may have travelled widely or undertook studies.

Once you start you will get the idea and the memories will start flowing. One thought will lead to another and soon you will have filled your 3rd chapter.



(4) What is your outlook on life?

In this chapter you should explain what you think of your life and what the future will be like. Explain through your eyes: Where will you be in the future? What your expectations of the future, good or bad? Would you have changed anything in your past? If so what?

Closer to the end of the writing process you will be able to re-order things to suit the way you want to present your story so the order you actually write in isn't important.

It is good to have your overall structure so you are writing with a purpose but the order you write in isn't important.

The placement of the parts of your story will most likely be worked out nearer the end of the writing. You certainly can benefit from an outline, but the table of contents might not be finalized until after you've recorded your different experiences



(5) Conclusion

The conclusion is the last chapter of your autobiography and an important one, too. In the conclusion you usually try to re-word the introduction and add some type of closure to bring the whole autobiography together, and how you would like to be remembered?

Editing Your Autobiography

A question many biographers ask when starting out on their project is "How long should it be?" This is your choice but an interesting story to read is one that keeps your attention, one that builds up to an action point, a climax and then usually presents some resolution revolving around that action point and theme.

Your story should be long enough to cover the subject but short enough to be interesting. As you work through the "How to Write Your Autobiography" process, and particularly as you organise your lists into an overall structure some of your jottings will stand out as strong themes, events or experiences that you will want to focus on.

This is how you begin to decide what to include and what to leave out. What are the key points of your story, what are the most relevant things in your life – family, career, travel, or all of these with equal emphasis?

What will your readers find most interesting? Usually readers like to discover more about the person whose story they are reading. They like to know about the context of events. What were the places, times and events you experienced really like?

Be honest and write from the heart and allow your readers to feel your emotions and form a picture in their mind from your words. Talk about your struggles and triumphs, the strong emotions and if difficult decisions had to be made write about how you made your decisions. *Do take your reader's feelings into account especially if it is a family story you are telling.*

Once you have your completed draft set it aside for a little while and take a break from it before you come back to it and read it from start to finish.

A good soft lead pencil is handy to mark those pieces that really don't work, need a rewrite or need deleting because they just don't move the story forward at all.

After you have done the rewrite it's time to think about the title and to organise a table of contents and chapter headings if you haven't already done so.

Certainly you can find a good title from one of the strongest themes of your autobiography. I'm sure you will have a more interesting title than "My Life".

Take the time to read a selection of other people's autobiographies, the famous and the not so famous from a critical perspective. Get a feel for what works in the way they tell their story and what doesn't. It's your autobiography, your story and its worth telling well.



AN EXAMPLE OF A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born on a warm, sunny day in June (*Date*) in (*Place of Birth*), (*Country*). I still live in (*Place of Birth*), (*Country*), and I go to school at Booker High School. I live with my mom, Kate; my brother, Jake; and my Aunt Molly. When I was born, my bother was fifteen-months-old and hid under the table from me. Jake is a sweet kid and he would do anything for me, but like all brothers and sisters we fight like cats and dogs. Sometimes when no one was around, Jake would come up to me and bite my toes for no reason. I still love him but only because he is my brother.

Who I am in life.

My name is Sally Friday. I started school when I was six-years-old. I went to kindergarten through fifth grade at Booker Elementary and while I was there, I won an award for perfect attendance. I also won an award for honor roll all four terms. Then I attended Booker Middle School, and there I also won a couple of awards: one for perfect attendance and two for being named Student of the Year--one in sixth grade and the other in eighth grade. I am now a senior at Booker High School. I plan on finishing school and maybe going to a community college.

What life means to me.

Life to me means friends and family who you can trust and who trusts you. I am pretty much on the happy side of life, but like all teens I do I have my "days of." That means I do have some sad days or depressed days. I have a few frinds here that sort of look out for me and when I am having a bad day, I have someone here at school to talk to. I make my school days go by thinking of either the next hour or what I will do when I get home or on the weekend. I'm not seeing anyone now but when I did have a boyfriend, our favorite places to go were the movies and out to dinner. Sometimes we went to the beach. Only once we went to an amusement park: Universal Studios. We were together for twenty-nine days and then we broke-up; so no, I don't think it was forever.

What's my outlook on the future.

The year 2018 will make twenty years since I graduated from high school. I think I will probably be still living here in Sarasota. I will be quite comfortable with my living situation, meaning that I will be married to Paul Smith. We will have one child: Linda Treasa Smith, who at that point will be three-years-old and a little devil. Paul is a sweet guy; he will do anything for anyone. He is six feet tall and built well. He has baby blue eyes and blond hair. We will have been together for five years and will be happy together--this is forever.

Conclusion

As I said in the beginning, I was born here in Florida and I've lived here my whole life. I would like to see more of the USA but unfortunately, I don't have any money to leave Florida to go anywhere right now. I hope you have enjoyed reading my life story as much as I have enjoyed writing it for you. Try to get as much as you can out of school; you're only there for twelve years and when you graduate, you're home free. Here's a tip for you to live or try to live by: If you think it, it can be done.

Written by Erika Baker



Publishing your Autobiography

After having written your story how are you going to share it with family and friends?

Unless you are blessed with beautiful copperplate writing and even if you are, you most probably will want to publish your story so that others may read it easily.

Now that you have decided you would like to publish your story it's time to consider the different options:

- You can self publish – Often the most practical option
- You can look for a professional publisher – a definite if you feel you have a blockbuster.

- You can record an audio book – great for letting friends and family hear you tell your story
- You could record and print your own custom CD and autobiography.

Or you can send a word document to www.autobiographyof.me Who would convert the autobiography to a Pdf file storing your life story and family pictures to their dedicated website for future viewing?

A Life Time Chart

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