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Title and Sub-title

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- Memoir
- An account of someone's memory of certain events or people pertaining to a certain period from a single person's or a group's perspective. It should cover one, or possibly several, themes throughout the story.
 - Proceedings or transactions of a group.

Memoir is not an autobiography or biography

- Autobiography
- an account of a person's life written by that person.
- Biography
- an account of a another person's life written by another person.

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Slide 2 plus description of self-focused memoir (first person.)

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Slide 3 plus description of other-focused memoir (third person.)

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Slide 4 plus description of organization-focused memoir (from a narrator's perspective.) When writing such a memoir, be careful to maintain a constant Point of View.

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Terms.

Flashback – This is where a scene is introduced into the story line which is from a period of time that is in the past in comparison to the main storyline’s timeframe. The author should make sure the reader understands that the scene is in a prior time period and when it has been completed, then the story has returned to its primary time frame. Here’s an example:

Moira and Jane entered their father’s bedroom where he lay dejectedly coughing up small amounts of blood. Jane rushed to his side and kissed him on the forehead while Moira tip-toed to a small wooden chair that sat in a dark corner, away from the bed. She sat quietly watching.

Moira was suddenly seven years old again. She hid under her bed with her hands over her ears so that she couldn’t hear the full fury of her drunken father’s words or her mother’s screams as he thrashed her with his belt.

Jane looked up from her sick father and turned looking to see where Moira had hidden herself.....

Linear Memoir – This memoir will cover one aspect of a person or organization over a defined period of time, people, or events.

Non-Linear Narrative Memoir – This memoir does not follow a linear path along, say, a chronological sequence of events. It can move forward and backward along the chronological timeline. This is not just a matter of having flashbacks in the main story line – this means that the main story line moves across time in a non-sequential manner. The author needs to ensure the reader understands fully any such shift.

Braided Memoir – This is where two or more themes are woven into the main story line. For example, a father may be writing the story of his son’s time in school – this is a fine linear memoir theme. But if he then interweaves his own view of his son’s time in school, he has introduced a second distinct theme, even though they are related. He could write one chapter about his son’s time in first grade, followed by a chapter of his own (the father’s) view of his son’s first grade. The story line could then continue with such pairs of chapters to create a braided memoir.

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The cartoon posits the thought that while the owners are away, then the dog, “Martin” is spending his time usefully, writing his memoir. However, the Point of View can be changed easily by removing the two words “the dog” that follow

“Martin.” Then the words of the cartoon could be what the dog is typing about its owner, “Martin”, while all of the dogs are out playing.

So, always be careful about point of view. If there is any doubt about the point of view, then at least one reader will get hung up on that one small detail.

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One of my original mentors, when I started to write my memoir seriously, was herself a psychotherapist. She indicated all writers would write a memoir or go into therapy. Many, like myself, did both.

Writers are always conjuring story lines or new creative thoughts in their heads. They are constantly looking for material for new stories.

Writers are normally engaged with life – they observe it, they live it fully. They don’t just let it slip by.

Writers want to understand who they are and how they became who they are.

Writers know that there is always one more layer of understanding that will fully flesh out a particular scene. Often such deeper understandings can be found in their own experiences.

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Types of memoir.

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| Coming of Age | Growing up on a pig farm in Nebraska. |
| Life Experiences | Seeking redemption while being held in solitary confinement in a Federal Correction Facility. |
| Relationships | How the love of a pound puppy sustained you while you survived an ugly divorce. |
| Cultural/Ethnic | Assimilation into a hostile new country after being forced to flee your home due to war. |
| Food | How you have followed every in-vogue food fad and what you have learned through those experiences. |
| Travel | How you have changed after experiencing zip-lining in many locations. |
| Survivor | Your adulthood living with an abusive father on the pig farm in Nebraska. |
| Addiction | Your journey of recovery from 8 years of being addicted to opioids. |
| Spiritual | Living for 15 years in a Trappist monastery. |

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Expectations

- Discovering Truths – Despite the author feeling that they know the story, there will be moments in the writing when a deeper understanding will shine light on a new truth. While writing my memoir, I wrote about an incident in northern Syria that I had always held in my mind and told stories about in a light and humorous manner. But in describing it on paper, in a concrete form, I recognized the serious dramatic significance of that incident.
- Exposing your story – You must determine your audience early on so that you can face the possibility of acceptance, praise, rejection, and doubt. How widely are you willing to share your work?
- Risky – There may be some readers who will doubt or reject your recollections, but stating your truth publicly can be extremely cathartic and life changing.
- Emotional – No matter what type of memoir you write, it will stir up some emotional memories. Connecting with those emotions can be very joyful, they can be painful, but to walk down that road can be very liberating and ultimately uplifting.
- No matter what you write about, there are going to be times when your own mind will throw up roadblocks or others around you will be negative. These obstacles are quite normal and should never be a show-stopper.
- Material – To build a story that is engaging, you are going to need to research a variety of subjects. Your own knowledge about the past will unlikely be enough to flesh out the entire story.
- Your Truth – You may start the memoir with an understanding of your truth, but be willing to change if you learn a new fact. But do not change just because someone else demands you change to their understanding. Write your story.

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Story Arc – Turning Points

Select 15 to 18 turning points (significant events or lessons). These normally can be associated with certain time periods which means that you can create a timeline – draw it on a large piece of paper. Alternatively, turning points can be associated with certain people or places, but not necessarily time based. Order these turning points and create an arc on a large piece of paper. There may be large gaps along the “timeline” – that’s fine.

Research details that give the turning points background and significance. Use the internet to fill in gaps of your information. Also, use your own resource:

- Journals and diaries. Dig these out of closets and the attic. Just a small phrase will reconnect you to a situation or gathering.
- Photographs are a great resource of memory jerks.
- Music is very evocative.
- Friends and relatives will have their view of the past. Allow their stories to open you to more repressed memories, but don’t take their memories as your own.

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Framework

Layout your chapters – normally one turning point per chapter. Ensure you can build a bridge between each chapter to maintain the story’s flow.

For each chapter, define the scenes that will flesh out the chapter. Give thought to the opening and closing scenes that will continue the flow from one chapter to the next. Try to give each closing scene a cliff-hanger that will carry the reader into the next chapter (they hopefully want more.)

Place flashbacks in their own scenes. They should never be integrated into a “current” scene.

The emotional content of each scene will engage the reader. Define carefully the dialogue, even though it will primarily be fictional. The dialogue allows the story to be moved forward or for additional character development to be added. Also, for each scene list out the inner thoughts any characters will have, feelings they may experience, and all sensory details that will paint a more detailed picture of the scene.

Takeaways are a useful ways to conclude chapters. These talk about lessons learned or universal truths that apply to the content of the chapter. At the end of the book or at significant turning points, add reflections which engage the reader with your deeper feelings about what the story has just described. The reader will want to understand what the story has meant to you, the author.

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Tough Emotional Content

- When the story needs to cover content that is very emotionally raw for the author, I would suggest writing it in small increments – a sentence each day. Don't write until you are overwhelmed. Write small sections – seeing the feelings on paper in word form can begin to release their powerful grip on you. Small increments and then slowly combine them into a full piece.
- Write an emotionally raw section in the third person – it allows a level of abstraction between you and the content. Once it feels right, slowly transition it to first person.
- Take the raw emotional content and write it as a letter to the other person concerned, but without any intention to send it to them. Just getting onto paper can be cathartic and allow you a means to write about it for your memoir. If writing the letter is not enough, then can I suggest you burn the letter as a way of releasing its power and sharing its pain with the universe.
- Lastly, talk with your psychotherapist to find a way to express what you need to say.

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Critics – I treat both inner and outer critics as one problem.

- Doubt – this critic shows up in many forms – they all question the validity of your story and your ability to tell it. You had the courage to start this endeavor and that same courage will allow to face down that negativity.
- You know the truth of your story – hold it close and firm – sometimes there may be reason to revise it when a detail comes to mind. A story's truth is not set in concrete, it is firm but flexible. Everybody will see any situation differently – we each have our own truths based on our own perceptions – but none is absolutely correct and to be accepted by all others.
- The simple justification for you writing your memoir is that if it inspires one other person to make a change in their life, then that is all you needed.

- Writers Block – If you hit a block, return to the framework and that large piece of paper with the timeline, play with it. Reground yourself in the flow of your story. Take some time to write, every day – it doesn't need to be your memoir – just write. Have faith the story and the flow will return.
- If you feel stale, take a break, vacation, retreat, or change of scenery. Find a new time to write, a different location, a new group of writers.

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References

Three books that I have found useful over time.

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The End.....