

A GUIDE TO WRITING YOUR BIOGRAPHY AND/OR THE BIOGRAPHY OF A FAMILY MEMBER

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INTRODUCTION

This is a step by step guide to recording your and your family's life story and a guide to providing photos for the book.

OVERVIEW

Your life and the lives of your family are important. You have taken on challenges and won the day. You moved the human condition forward and bettered the earth. Tell your story and Inspire yourself and others!

You will leave a legacy – your story and the story of your family. You may think you have lived an unremarkable life, but succeeding generations will be interested in hearing it. What you consider normal and mundane will be interesting and slightly exotic to them.

You will help protect the history of your family. You may be telling all the stories you can about your life and your take on things, but that won't assure you that it will be remembered the way you are telling it! We rely on written or recorded information much more than verbal histories. Record your story and make sure it is woven into the history of your family.

You may inspire someone else with your story. Remember those challenges you conquered? What about those problems you solved? Someone else, somewhere on the planet needs to hear how you did those things. They need to understand that it is possible and they need to be inspired by the way you conquered and solved them.

It opens the door to reconcile open issues from your past. When you review your life from start to present, you will encounter unresolved items. Reviewing your life and accomplishments can cause you to see how you have overcome real and perceived obstacles such as these. Reflection can help you move past the feelings and perhaps provide a path to reconciliation with relatives and friends.

SUMMARY

Writing your biography:

- Provides an opportunity for self-reflection and self-awareness.
- Helps to process and make sense of life experiences and emotions.
- Allows you to pass on your legacy and values to future generations.
- Can serve as a therapeutic tool for healing and growth.
- Gives you a chance to document important events and memories for posterity.
- Offers a creative outlet for self-expression and storytelling.
- Helps to clarify personal goals and aspirations.
- Enhances communication and relationship-building skills.
- Improves writing skills and creativity.
- Can be a source of inspiration and motivation for others.

DEFINITION

- An **autobiography** is a nonfiction story of a person's life, written from their point of view.
- A **memoir** is a type of autobiography that focuses on a particular period in the author's life rather than their whole life.

It is best to record an autobiography. An autobiography should include all the most important details of your life story and/or the life story of the family member about whom you write.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- A description of your personal origin story. This can include your hometown, your family history, your formative years, some key family members and loved ones, and touchstone moments in your education. Profile people and teachers who have influenced you.
- Significant experiences. Add accounts of each personal experience that shaped your worldview and your approach to life in the present day.
- Detailed recollections of episodes from your professional life - often these are the turning points that your autobiography will be known for the moments that would inspire someone to pick up your book in the first place. Be sure to give them extra care and attention.
- Personal stories of failure. Follow your setbacks with a good story of how you responded to that failure.
- Your philosophy on life. What wisdom would you like to leave to your family? What aspects of life are important to you? How do you define your character?
- Write about the people that have inspired you. Who were or are your role models? Why or how did they affect you.
- What are the events that have defined you? What significant events have helped shape your destiny, outlook on life, relationships etc.?
- What do you aspire to? Your romantic life, your faith, your aspirations, your dreams and your spiritual profile
- Profile your family. Describe those closest to you and their character. Their lives and your relationship with them. Their influence on you.
- Write about your friends, your pets, your workmates and your sporting and/or club companions.
- Discuss your passions - your favourite authors, movies, music and songs, art, theatre, food and drinks, games and activities, desires etc.
- Write about your belief systems, your politics and your relationships with the community
- Write about where you have lived. The country, the town, village, suburb and the homes you occupied etc. – what are the favourite memories
- Profile your travels. Where have you been? What were your experiences? Favourite places? People you met. Friends you made. Life-changing experiences.
- Talk about things that have triggered your emotions. Things that made you proud, sad, happy, excited, disappointed, angry, terrified, joyous, laugh, cry etc.
- Write about your significant achievements in life. Honours gained, inventions, awards, trophies, educational awards, workplace moments etc.
- Write about your career. Why you chose it, milestones and achievements, etc.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

- 1 Procrastination is your worst enemy! Make a start ... “I was born...”
- 2 Use a structured approach – Create your major headings, then sub-headings for each major etc. as below – then simply write sentences where required.
 - Major headings

- Sub headings
 - Sub-sub headings
 - Key words
 - Sentences

3 I have prepared a long list of prompts to help you write your story or the story of another family member. They are a sequence of simple memory joggers that will help you structure your story or, for that matter, a story for anybody who has a story to be told. Not every prompt requires an answer and some may be irrelevant, but using a prompt system makes the task so much easier. (n.b. If all you can do is to answer the prompt questions with brief replies and you do not have the ability to write the story, I can generally create the prose required from your answers) These prompts can be found at

https://www.handricks.com/files/ugd/7befd5_ea36b63d32a7416fb128c85b94459461.pdf

4 The seven ages of our lives can also be a great help in getting some structure to your story. I have prepared a simple document which will help – this can be found at

https://www.handricks.com/files/ugd/7befd5_bcd38c5554214f529baa624148397ec8.pdf

5 As an example, my biography is on-line and can be viewed and read on-line at

https://www.handricks.com/files/ugd/7befd5_b2059bb3701444cd963ebdbf60a73e77.pdf

AI WRITING TOOLS

Recently one of the most significant developments in technology has been released – AI (Artificial Intelligence) text and image generators.

- ChatGPT, created by a company called OpenAI, is a natural language processing tool driven by AI technology that allows you to have human-like text created. The language model can answer questions, and assist you with tasks such as composing emails, essays, and code.
- OpenAI is also responsible for creating DALL-E, a popular AI art generator.
- ChatGPT is the fastest growing app of all time. In January, only two months after its launch, UBS analysis estimates that ChatGPT had 100 million active users!
- ChatGPT can write and debug computer programs, compose music, teleplays, fairy tales, and student essays; answer test questions (sometimes, depending on the test, at a level above the average human test-taker); write poetry and song lyrics.
- ChatGPT remembers previous prompts given to it in the same conversation; journalists have suggested that this will allow ChatGPT to be used as a personalized therapist. To prevent offensive outputs from being presented to and produced from ChatGPT, queries are filtered through OpenAI's company-wide moderation API, and potentially racist or sexist prompts are dismissed. ChatGPT can write introduction and abstract sections of scientific articles, which raises ethical questions. Several papers have already listed ChatGPT as co-author.

CHATGPT LINK:

<https://chat.openai.com/chat>

DALL-E LINK

<https://labs.openai.com/>

PHOTOS FOR THE BOOK

- Your biography will need approximately 500 photos (the more the better)
- As a guide, you will need photos of:
 - Your family's (and your spouse's) older generations – great grandparents, grandparents, great uncles and great aunts etc.
 - Your (and your spouse's) parents, aunts and uncles
 - Photos of you (and your spouse)
 - Children, grandchildren etc.
 - Homes your family has lived in
 - Workplaces, pets, special events, certificates, medals, awards etc.
 - Wedding, school, sports photos
- If you scan them, please scan at least 300dpi.

SOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK

After a long life, it can be sometimes difficult to remember specific incidences in your time on planet Earth!

There are many things that you may have collected, saved or have access to that will help prompt you into remembering important things in your life:

- Pets you've owned
- Houses you've lived in – Photos/Plans
- Cars
- Collections
- Humour/Cartoons
- Your heroes
- Your friends
- World Events during your lifetime
- Locations you remember
- People Associated with Locations
- Workplace/Colleagues
- Clubs/Associations
- Certificates
- Newspaper Clippings
- Book Covers
- Maps – Google Earth
- Street Views – Google Maps
- Poetry
- Afterword
- War – Medals/Ships/Battle Details
- Cemetery – gravesites/ headstones
- Signatures
- Sports
- Popular Culture of the times – Films/Books/People/Politics
- School work from childhood
- Advertisements of the times
- Fashion of the times
- Notable connections
- Plunket cards/books
- Music – Yours/of the times

1st vs 3rd PERSON WRITING

First and third person are ways of describing points of view. **First person** is the I/we perspective and **Third person** is the he/she/it/they perspective.

While first-person writing offers intimacy and immediacy between narrator and reader, third-person narration offers the potential for both objectivity and omniscience.

My preference is 1st person for a personal life story:

- First-person point of view, of course, can only speak for the narrator and can only see things through the first-person narrator's eyes.
- Writing in first-person should come naturally if you're used to writing journal entries, blog posts, or personal essays.
- First-person establishes a kind of intimacy between the narrating character and the reader. It also invites the reader to identify with the one narrating the story from their perspective.
- First-person is more subjective than third-person, which can be a problem if the reader finds it difficult to identify with the narrator's attitudes, reactions, and general worldview.
- If they do resonate with the reader, though, first-person can draw the reader in more effectively than a dispassionate third-person narrative of the same story.