

## HOW TO WRITE YOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHY – 6 TIPS

### 1. Gather information

- Start with the basic information you already have. Write down all of the facts you can think of regarding your life story.
- Start with your name, birth date, marriage date, and other significant dates. Do the same for your grandparents, parents, siblings, spouse, and other family members and non-family members who played significant roles in your life.
- Then write down all you can remember about these people. Be sure to include your impressions of them and how these individuals influenced your life.
- If you have any pictures, diplomas, letters, newspaper clippings, personal items, or anything else about or belonging to these people, examine them to refresh your memory and add to your basic information.

### 2. Interview

- Talk to family members, relatives, friends, business associates, and anyone else who may have pertinent information.
- Older relatives can often provide a wealth of information about your parents and grandparents, while your siblings, friends, and associates can remind you of events and conversations you may have forgotten about.

### 3. Use other sources of information

- Depending on what you choose to emphasize in your autobiography, it might be helpful to send away for copies of birth certificates, school records, military records, or other documents that can fill in information gaps.

### 4. Start your story

- The beginning is an excellent place to start, but sometimes the mere thought of starting a lengthy story can be intimidating. You may find it easier to tackle a small piece of the story, then another, then another, and so on.
- You might, for example, make a list of significant events in your life (for example, the day you met your spouse-to-be, the birth of your first child, your entrance and/or exit from the military, graduating from college, opening your business, leaving your spouse, getting fired, and so on). Then write a short segment about each event.
- Or you might list the five best and five worst moments in your life and write about them.
- Or perhaps you might start with the most unusual things that have happened to you.
- Or you might begin by writing about a particular day in your life, and go on from there.
- It's only important that you begin somewhere. You can rearrange and piece it all together later.

### 5. Pull it all together

- Now it's time to put the pieces together to make an interesting story.

- There is no “best” way to structure and write an autobiography.
- However, autobiographies often start with something about the family history to set the stage for the emergence of the book’s star (you). Your birth is also a good place to begin.
- For added dramatic effect, you may wish to start with a quick look at your life as it is now, or at some dramatic or impressive event in your adult life, then flash back to the beginning.
- Some life stories lend themselves to a dramatic or non-chronological approach. Others, however, are best told in a simple, straight-forward manner. Whatever works for your story is the best approach.

#### 6. Consider developing a theme

- Strictly speaking, you don’t have to have a theme for your autobiography; you can simply recount the most significant and interesting events of your life.
- However, a theme strengthens and sharpens your story. There are innumerable possible themes, including “how my family shaped my life,” “overcoming adversity,” and “love is a gift.” Your theme will often emerge on its own as you gather material and write about the events in your life.
- Once you’ve selected your theme, go back through your material and make sure you’ve selected the incidents that support it. These should be emphasized in your book, with the others given less emphasis or even omitted.
- If, for example, your theme is “the value of service and sacrifice,” you may write just enough about your childhood to cover the basic facts before you get right to the point when you began serving and sacrificing—perhaps the day you joined the military or Peace Corps, began adopting orphans, or committed yourself to raising money for the less fortunate.
- If your theme is “love is a gift,” you may focus on your relationships with your family, friends, and other people throughout life, giving less attention and space to your education and business.