

How to Start Your Life-Story Project



1. Make a comprehensive list of the relationships and events which have shaped your life.

This initial list is something that will jog your memory.

We suggest you put each memory (a short explanation is sufficient) on a 3x5 card—one memory per card. Putting your memories on cards will allow you to sort them later into categories that will help you format how you will tell your life story.

It may take you some time to compile these memories, but take your time. It is important to know what you want to include in your life story and what you will leave out.

Here are things that may find their way onto your cards:

- The birth or arrival of a sibling.
- A fire, flood, tornado, automobile accident.
- A relationship with an older person or a peer.
- A failure or a success at school; scholarships, a decision to go or not to go to the university, a conflict or connection with a teacher, having to leave school for work.
- A failure or success at work; what choices did that influence?
- An illness or a death in the family.
- Boyfriends/girlfriends, deciding to marry or not to marry, and why.
- Marriage(s).
- Children.
- Career choices.
- Religious, spiritual experiences.

2. Analyze and categorize your cards.

Group your cards into categories or headings. It will be easier to construct your story for yourself and your readers. You might cluster relationships under a title like "On the Road to Meeting My Spouse", or you might cluster them under the title of "Christmases in Missouri".

Put all the items you have grouped together and put them under their own appropriate headings. Remember to make notes about your understanding of what you were thinking at the time and why you made choices you did.

Add or delete, combine or expand, until you are satisfied that you have a listed the experiences that not only represent of your life history but which are also organized to give the reader a "bird's eye view" of your life. You can add to your cards any time it occurs to you. Your cards are handy references that will not only give you a clear insight into your past experiences but will give your readers insight into who you are or what your life was like.

3. Narrow your cards into a core group of cards; choose your ten most important or interesting relationships or events.

Select your most crucial events, the ones which made you the person you are today. Limiting yourself to ten items forces you to evaluate and select the most significant material to write about first. In this way, you will produce a body of stories that are significant and you won't use up your time and energy writing about events that after consideration are just minor events in your life's evolution.

4. Begin writing. Here are a few tips that will give a measure of professionalism to your writing:
 - Open your book with a captivating lead sentence. Choose a sentence that will hook your reader into wanting to read more. A lead sentence is not a summary of what your life has been. It is just a sentence to get the reader interested. The rule of thumb is, "Hook your readers first, explain later."
 - Use metaphors instead of adjectives to give your readers clear pictures of the events in your life.
 - Use strong verbs and nouns. Avoid words like: some, many, most, very, etc. Be specific.
 - Be concise. Another rule of thumb is to look at your sentences and see how many words you can eliminate and still keep its meaning.
 - Use the right word. Be choosy about the words you put into sentences. Words create pictures. Ask yourself if the word you have chosen delivers the precise idea you want your readers to get.