

Master Autobiography Planning Workbook

Complete pre-writing guide for organizing your autobiography

SECTION 1: DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE

Why Are You Writing This?

Check all that apply: ☐ Academic assignment ☐ Personal reflection/legacy ☐ Family history preservation ☐ Professional requirement ☐ Application/scholarship ☐ Therapeutic/healing purpose ☐ Share lessons learned ☐ Other:

Who Will Read This?

Primary audience: _____

What they need to know: _____

What Do You Want Readers to Take Away?

SECTION 2: QUICK FACTS

Full Name: _____

Birth Date/Place: _____

Current Age/Location: _____

Time Period You'll Cover: From _____ to _____

Target Length: _____ words/pages

Deadline (if applicable): _____

SECTION 3: MEMORY BRAINSTORM

Earliest Memories

What's your earliest memory?

Other early childhood memories: 1.

2.

3.

Significant Moments (Any Age)

List 10-15 moments that shaped who you are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____

SECTION 4: LIFE TIMELINE

Create a visual timeline of major events:

Ages 0-10:

Ages 11-18:

Ages 19-25:

Ages 26-35:

Ages 36-50:

Ages 50+:

Mark these on your timeline: - Births, deaths, marriages - Moves/relocations - Education milestones - Career changes - Major achievements - Challenges/crises - Turning points

SECTION 5: THEME IDENTIFICATION

What Patterns Do You Notice?

Common themes in your life: ☐ Overcoming adversity ☐ Identity/belonging ☐ Family relationships ☐ Cultural heritage ☐ Personal transformation ☐ Achievement/ambition ☐ Loss and resilience ☐ Love and relationships ☐ Faith/spirituality ☐ Career/purpose ☐
Other: _____

Your central theme(s):

What question does your life story answer?

SECTION 6: KEY PEOPLE

Important People in Your Story

Family Members:

Mother/Maternal Figure: Name: _____

Role in your life: _____ Key memory: _____

Father/Paternal Figure: Name: _____

Role in your life: _____ Key memory: _____

Siblings: Names: _____

Relationships: _____

Other Family:

Friends/Mentors:

Person 1: _____ Why important: _____

Person 2: _____ Why important: _____

Person 3: _____ Why

important: _____

Significant Others:

SECTION 7: FAMILY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Use these to gather stories from family members:

For Parents/Grandparents:

1. What do you remember about the day I was born?
2. What was I like as a child?
3. What's your favorite memory of us together?
4. What do you think I should know about our family history?
5. What was happening in your life when I was born?
6. What hopes did you have for me?
7. What family traditions did you want to pass down?
8. What challenges did our family face when I was growing up?
9. What's a story about me you love to tell?
10. What do you wish I knew about you?

For Siblings:

1. What's your earliest memory of me?
2. What was our relationship like growing up?
3. What's the funniest thing that happened between us?
4. How would you describe me as a kid?
5. What moment with me stands out most?

For Friends:

1. How did we meet?
2. What was your first impression of me?
3. What's changed about me over the years?
4. What experience with me had the biggest impact on you?
5. How would you describe who I am?

Interview Notes:

SECTION 8: STORIES TO TELL

Select Your Best Stories

From your brainstormed memories, choose 5-10 stories you MUST include:

Story 1: Event: _____
Why it matters: _____ What it
reveals about you: _____

Story 2: Event: _____
Why it matters: _____ What it
reveals about you: _____

Story 3: Event: _____
Why it matters: _____ What it
reveals about you: _____

Story 4: Event: _____
Why it matters: _____ What it
reveals about you: _____

Story 5: Event: _____
Why it matters: _____ What it
reveals about you: _____

Story 6: Event: _____
Why it matters: _____ What it
reveals about you: _____

Story 7: Event: _____
Why it matters: _____ What it
reveals about you: _____

SECTION 9: STRUCTURE DECISION

Choose Your Organizational Approach:

☐ **Chronological** (Birth to present, following time order) - **Best for:** Traditional life stories, showing development over time - **Challenge:** Can feel predictable

☐ **Thematic** (Organized by topics: family, work, relationships, etc.) - **Best for:** Exploring specific aspects of identity - **Challenge:** Harder to show time progression

☐ **Pivotal Moments** (Built around 3-5 key turning points) - **Best for:** Shorter autobiographies, focusing on transformation - **Challenge:** Requires clear turning points

☐ **Frame Story** (Present moment reflecting on past) - **Best for:** Showing how you've changed, philosophical reflection - **Challenge:** More complex structure

My chosen structure: _____

Why this works for my story:

SECTION 10: CHAPTER/SECTION PLANNING

Map Your Structure

Chapter/Section 1: Title: _____
_____ Time
period/theme: _____ Key events:
_____ Main point:

Chapter/Section 2: Title: _____
_____ Time
period/theme: _____ Key events:
_____ Main point:

Chapter/Section 3: Title: _____
_____ Time

period/theme: _____ Key events:
_____ Main point:

Chapter/Section 4: Title:

_____ Time
period/theme: _____ Key events:
_____ Main point:

Chapter/Section 5: Title:

_____ Time
period/theme: _____ Key events:
_____ Main point:

(Add more as needed)

SECTION 11: OPENING & CLOSING

How Will You Begin?

Possible opening strategies: ☐ Start with a vivid scene from a pivotal moment ☐ Begin with present reflection, then flashback ☐ Open with a key question your life answers ☐ Start with surprising statement about yourself ☐ Begin with significant moment from childhood

Your opening idea:

How Will You End?

Possible closing strategies: ☐ Return to opening scene/question with new understanding ☐ Reflect on lessons learned ☐ Look forward to the future ☐ Share wisdom/advice ☐ End with meaningful image/moment

Your closing idea:

SECTION 12: SENSORY MEMORY BANK

Collect specific details to enrich your writing:

Childhood Home

What it looked like: _____ Smells:
_____ Sounds:
_____ Textures/feelings:

Important Places

Place 1: _____ Sensory
details: _____

Place 2: _____ **Sensory**
details: _____

Significant Objects

Object 1: _____ **Why**
meaningful: _____

Object 2: _____ **Why**
meaningful: _____

SECTION 13: VOICE & TONE DECISIONS

How Will You Tell Your Story?

Tone: (Check one or blend) [] Reflective and philosophical [] Humorous and light []
Serious and contemplative [] Vulnerable and honest [] Triumphant and inspiring

Perspective: [] Mostly past events with present reflection [] Equal balance past and
present perspective [] Present looking back with wisdom

Level of vulnerability: [] Very open about struggles [] Selective honesty [] More
private/reserved

SECTION 14: RESEARCH CHECKLIST

Information you need to gather:

- ☐ Exact dates of key events
- ☐ Names of people/places (spell correctly)
- ☐ Family history/genealogy details
- ☐ Historical context for time periods
- ☐ Photos to reference for descriptions
- ☐ Documents (birth certificates, letters, etc.)
- ☐ Interview family members
- ☐ Visit significant locations (if possible)
- ☐ Review old journals/diaries
- ☐ Check facts/verify memories

Research notes:

SECTION 15: POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Anticipate Obstacles

Difficult topics to address:

How you'll handle them:

People who might object to your story:

Boundaries you'll set:

Memories that are unclear:

How you'll handle gaps:

SECTION 16: WRITING SCHEDULE

Create Your Timeline

Start date: _____

Target completion date: _____

Weekly writing goal: _____ words/pages

Writing schedule:

Monday: _____

Tuesday: _____

Wednesday: _____

Thursday: _____

Friday: _____

Weekend: _____

Milestones:

Draft introduction by: _____

Complete first section by: _____

Halfway point target: _____

Full draft completion: _____

Revision deadline: _____

SECTION 17: QUICK-START EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Five-Minute Free Write

Prompt: "The moment that changed everything was..."

Write continuously for 5 minutes without stopping:

Exercise 2: Photo Prompt

Find an old photo. Describe: - What you see - What you remember - What you feel looking at it - What's not visible in the photo

Exercise 3: "I Am From" Poem

Complete these prompts:

I am from _____ (specific place)

I am from _____ (family tradition)

I am from _____ (belief or value)

I am from _____ (memorable object)

Exercise 4: Letter to Your Younger Self

What would you tell your 10-year-old self?

Exercise 5: Defining Moments List

List 5 moments when you became who you are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

SECTION 18: FINAL PREPARATION

Before You Start Writing:

- ☐ Completed all brainstorming sections
- ☐ Chosen organizational structure
- ☐ Selected key stories to include
- ☐ Determined tone and voice
- ☐ Gathered necessary research/materials

- ☐ Created writing schedule
 - ☐ Set up dedicated writing space
 - ☐ Identified potential challenges
 - ☐ Decided on opening and closing
 - ☐ Ready to begin first draft
-

QUICK REFERENCE: AUTOBIOGRAPHY TYPES

Academic (High School/College): - Focus: Personal growth, formative experiences - Length: 2-5 pages - Tone: Reflective, honest

Professional: - Focus: Career trajectory, expertise - Length: 500-1,000 words - Tone: Accomplished, credible

Cultural: - Focus: Identity, heritage, navigating cultures - Length: Varies - Tone: Thoughtful, nuanced

Spiritual: - Focus: Faith journey, meaning-making - Length: Varies - Tone: Vulnerable, questioning

Full Memoir: - Focus: Complete life story or significant period - Length: Book-length - Tone: Literary, layered

REMEMBER

Effective autobiographies: - Have a clear theme or question - Include specific, vivid details - Show transformation/growth - Balance events with reflection - Are honest without oversharing - Connect personal to universal

You don't need: - Perfect memory of everything - To include your entire life - To write chronologically - To make yourself a hero or victim - To have all answers

Start where you are. Write what you remember. Discover meaning as you write.

Now, take your completed workbook and begin your first draft!