

Writing and Editing Autobiography, Biography and Memoir:

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Every life is infused with a range of experiences that can capture the relation between individuals and the society in which they live or have lived. Autobiography, Biography and Memoir fall within the increasingly popular genre of life writing. Life writing gives a unique impression of the present, past, local, national, private and public experiences of an individual. Popularity of the genre means serious competition. So before you begin to write your story, you need to research the material, not only to ensure its details are accurate but also to find some interesting angle from which to tell it.

Researching will guide you to something inspiring about the life. It may reveal something previously undiscovered about an individual, the society or community you feel would benefit others. How well you convey this interesting discovery will give your life writing a better edge in the competition. However you must be clear about how to write and edit in your chosen form.

Autobiography presents a life account directly from its subject – the *author*. It must include biographical details: date and place of birth, present the genealogy of the subject and so on, usually in chronological order. Importantly, it should include the experiences, people and places that have vitally shaped the individual at given periods in their lives. There must be something intriguing about the life to stimulate the reader's interest.

Biography also provides standard biographical information, but is written *about the subject* by someone else – in *third person*. As with Autobiography it must include some fascinating experiences about the subject. It can be organised around a singular object of interest rather than trying to convey the total sum of their life. The aim is to present readers with a unique way of seeing the individual.

The Memoir focuses on a particular moment or period of time. It has a kind of soul-searching rigour not easily found in the Biography or Autobiography. It may not present the standard biographical information, but instead highlight the day, month, year, season of a given experience that has instrumentally impacted an individual. It is a truthful recounting or memory of that experience. Without this honesty the Memoir can become flat. Deep self-reflecting and openness to explore the memory in full is what lends uniqueness to the life experience, whether this has been traumatic or distinctively fulfilling.

Research and writing completed, your next consideration is editing the work. The first approach to editing your work should be to give it a little distance. You will be able to return to it with fresh eyes and be more positively critical. All writing should be read aloud once completed. This allows you to check its rhythm along with unnecessary rhyming, grammar, repetitions and sentence variety. The structure needs to be well organised and pleasurable to read for example: consider how enticing is your beginning, how does the narrative hold in the middle and maintain its inspirational vigour to the end. Accuracy of dates and places needs to be checked to maintain your reader's trust. Polishing your work also involves removing clichés and creating new metaphors and images to give it original colour.

Even if you're writing about a subject, as with Biography, this is not an objective exercise. All writing for publication needs editing by someone who is able to distance themselves from it and identify areas of inconsistency. Friends and family might not have the time, share your passion or have the skills to properly advise on editing. To avoid post publication *cringes*, a professional editor should be approached before you attempt to publish your work. CompletelyNovel has a team of proof readers and editors dedicated to giving your work that professional, quality finish.