



Where Do I Start?

Many novice writers ask me, "Where should I start to write a lifestory?"

Writing first what I most feel like writing first has always worked for me. My suggestion to a novice writer is therefore...

Always start to write from any part of the story you want to. By following our interests, we are most likely following a vein of inspiration that will facilitate writing.

"But how do I know where the story begins?" the writer, unsure as you perhaps are at this very moment, persists in asking, as if looking more for confirmation than an answer. "Aren't you supposed to start writing a story at the beginning?"

"Start anywhere you want to," I repeat. "Starting to write your story is not the same as finding your beginning. Finding your beginning may seem like something you need to do early on, but it is not."

Getting Going

Finding the beginning of your story is never your first task. Your first task is always to BEGIN TO WRITE. *Write whatever comes to mind, in whatever order you choose, in whatever length you choose.* Get some text down on paper. Beginning to fill a white sheet with words is often the hardest part of writing, so start right away. Write all the text that you can produce from the memories you have chosen from your MemoryList—preferably the most important items on your list.

This initial text is likely to be a "quick take" of an event, a person, or a feeling. It will not be a complete depiction. It certainly will not yet be a story.

Pre-writing

To help you begin to write, look at the items on your MemoryList.

How many of them can go together? Can you cluster memories from your list to support one story—or even one part of a story? For instance, you might have written: *having measles at 13*.

Elsewhere, you might also have written:

- ✓ being impatient whenever I did nothing.
- ✓ Mother was a good person to have around if you were sick.
- ✓ I loved to listen to talk radio.

As you look at these MemoryList notes, you will realize that you already have the framework of a story: the onslaught of the illness and the pain associated with it; your impatience in life did not prepare you to be patient with measles; your mother's good care; and your being entertained by talk radio was a wonderful gift during the time you were sick. There will be other things that will come to mind as you write, but you don't need them to start to write. In fact, you have already begun the *process of writing* if not the writing itself. Because you have done thorough pre-writing, beginning to write will be much easier.

There is a FREE 35-page MemoryList Questions e-Book you can download at www.turningmemories.com/qebkstore.html.

Rough Draft

During the rough draft stage, you are merely beginning to put words down on paper. Do not expect your text to be polished at this point.

Start writing your rough draft on half sheets of paper. Take an 8 1/2 by 11 sheet of paper (I recycle paper by using the back of printed sheets) and cut it in half. On top of each half page, write as your title the topic from your MemoryList. Then write whatever comes to mind about each topic *without deciding how any of this will all come together*. You are in the rough draft stage. You are not yet creating order to your writing. You are merely trying to produce a stack of half sheets of writing. Whether or not you are writing well or how your final draft will shape up is something you will resolve later. This is true as well for deciding what the beginning scene of your story will be.

Later you will organize what you have written. You'll be free to shuffle the half sheets into any order you want. You will decide that the writing on this half sheet belongs before what is written on this other and that something else belongs afterwards.

As you order your sheets, you may realize that you already have written something that can serve as a beginning or you may sense that you clearly do not have a beginning yet.

Choosing a beginning will come later and has nothing to do with where you start to write. The fact is you can start to write from anywhere you want to.

If you are working with a computer, instead of half-sheets, you must change pages every time you change topic. (You do this by placing a page break each time when you move on to a new topic.)

What Should Go Into Your Story?

Before you go on to organize your half sheets of rough draft, let's stop a minute to think about what goes into making a successful story.

It's not enough to remember things or to remember them accurately. It's also important to write in an interesting and effective manner. You need to *craft* your stories as deliberately as possible. Let's look at some of the elements that go into deliberate crafting.

1) All stories have characters. The people portrayed in a story are the characters of that story. Sometimes the character will be you; sometimes it will be someone else.

Like all people, your characters speak and move around—but they do so only in the context of the written story. Your reader has to "see" and "hear" your characters. If you fail to write what your character is doing, thinking, and feeling, the reader has no way of knowing what is going on.

You must write about your characters with **specific and striking details**: *what did your characters look like* (hair color and texture, height, the style of their walk)? *what did they wear* (colors, textures, styles—how did they wear their clothing, what was their bearing)? You can help your reader "hear" what your characters are saying: in your dialog, use their favorite words or sayings; write their speech phonetically (as it sounds). Give us a glimpse of their inner lives by telling us how you think they might have felt.

Identify on your MemoryList what is **special and true** about each of your characters and then describe that in detail. Doing so will make your writing unique. You may think (and I've found it's a natural tendency to do so) that your people and the community you grew up in were average and just ordinary—like everyone and everywhere else—and that there's no point in going into detail. You may think your readers will, of course, recognize and be familiar with your characters—if not them, at least people just like them.

This is usually not the case!

It may be true that people of your childhood may not have been the most exotic, but a closer look may reveal how they were different in their values and home cultures from what is the norm.

To help you write with more detail, choose to "write to" someone who is completely or partly unfamiliar with your background. Perhaps you have a grandchild who does not yet know your story. Keep this child in mind when you write, and this will focus you to include many details you would omit if you presumed all your readers were just like you. Perhaps you have a specific type of reader in mind; keep him/her vivid as you write. *Your job as a writer is to tell your story as though no one will recognize anything as familiar or take anything for granted.*

Make a list of details of the things that are important to the person you are writing about. Be sure to include relationships, jobs, education, hobbies, attitudes, background, politics, religious beliefs, life philosophy. Write about each of these categories.

Write details of this person's speech, dress, demeanor (posture, physical attitude), etc. Include dialog and enough details to make it easy for the reader to *see, hear, feel* what you are writing about.

2) All stories have some action. The action is what happens in your story. The action should be told in a straightforward manner. Generally speaking, the action is the conflict of the story. It moves toward a crisis (when something needs to be done) and then is resolved.

When writing the action, you should take the same care to write with specific and striking details as you do in writing about character.

3) All stories have setting. The setting is the environment of the story. The environment is both physical and non-physical. The physical setting includes the room, the building, the whole natural landscape, etc. The non-physical includes culture, personality, history, and everything else that goes into shaping a person. It is important to describe the setting in enough detail so that the reader can have a clear sense of it.

Good luck.

Your stories are important and you can succeed in writing them!

Soleil Lifestory Network

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