

Bringing Life to Your Life Stories

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Bringing Life to Your Life Stories

- Importance
- Obstacles
- Where Do I Start?
- Writing
- Putting it All Together

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Importance of a Life Story

- Why write?
- Who would you like to read it?
- What would you like them to get out of it?

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Obstacles to Writing a Personal History

- Lack of Interest / Motivation
- Lack of Time
- Overwhelmed
- Poor Memory
- Lack of Writing Skills

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Where Do I Start?

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How Do You Eat an Elephant?



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One Bite at a Time

- Break the life down into “bite-size” pieces
 - Topics, Stories, Vignettes, etc.
- Advantages
 - Can work on history with little blocks of time
 - Avoid being overwhelmed
 - Flexible - No need to start at birth and end at death
 - Feel satisfaction as each piece is completed

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Where do I start?

- Gather What You Already Have
 - Records, Photos, Journals, Tapes, etc.
- Make a list of important events & memories
 - Subject's life
 - Family members' lives
- Add important historical events and cultural information to the list
- Pick one that interests you and get to work

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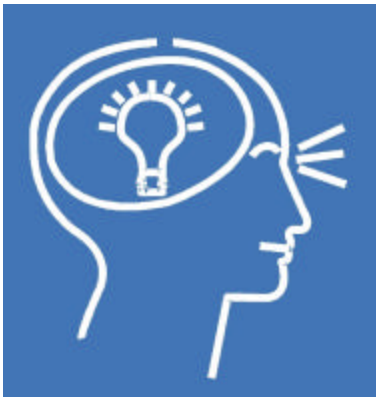
Writing About a Topic

1. Envision the Scene
2. Give the Facts
3. Add Context
4. Show, Don't Tell
5. Let Your Characters Speak
6. Make Your Writing "Natural"
7. Make it Easy to Read



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Envision the Scene



- Think about the scene you wish to create
- Take a little time at first to save a lot of time later
- Stories will be more complete and understandable

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Brainstorming

1. Think of the topic
2. Make a list of everything you can think of / remember about the topic
 - Don't worry if it makes sense
 - Don't worry about spelling
 - Keep each item brief (usually 1-2 words)

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Brainstorming

3. Move the items around into coherent groups and a logical order
4. Review the list and add any additional thoughts or memories which come to mind
5. Continue adding items, organizing them, and reviewing them until you can't think of anything else

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Give the Facts

- Essential Facts
 - “Who”, “What”, “Where”
- Facts to Add Interest and Understanding
 - “How” and “Why”
- Explain how and why the event took place
- Don't assume that the reader already knows what you know



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Add Context

- **DICTIONARY:** Context is the set of all facts or circumstances that surround a situation or an event
- Context is all the information we can get about our topic
- Context will help us to interpret our topic and to write a more interesting story

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Add Context

- Include information about the world, the location, and attitudes of the time
- Don't take details for granted
 - What may be obvious to you about the setting may not be clear to future readers
- What events happened near or at the time of this story?



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Show, Don't Tell

- Exposition
 - Tells the reader what happened
- Narration
 - Shows the reader what the writer wants them to know, sense, or feel
 - Describes the characters and situations through an appeal to the reader's senses

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Show, Don't Tell

- Exposition
 - Marcy had a hard time getting through the halls to the principal's office, and was afraid she might be late. Yet she was hesitant to enter after she arrived at the door.
- Narration
 - As Marcy wove her way through the ocean of students, she often had to twist sideways to make herself fit through a small opening in the crowds. She often glanced quickly up at the hall clock as she constantly bumped from side to side. Finally, she arrived at the principal's door. She reached for the door knob, then quickly pulled her hand back. For just a moment she hesitated, just staring at the knob. She took a loud, deep breath. The suddenly, she grabbed the knob, turned it and walked through the door.

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Let Your Characters Speak

- Dialogue makes people more believable to your readers
- Don't be afraid to paraphrase or create a conversation that you didn't actually witness

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Make Your Writing “Natural”

- Write clearly
- Let your voice and personality shine through
- Read your writing aloud. Does it feel natural to you?
- Ask someone else to read it aloud. Did it sound the way you wanted it to sound?

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Your Writing Must Be Easy to Read

- Readability Checks
 - Fog Index < 10
 - Flesch-Kincaid < 7.5
 - Sentence Length between 12-20 words
 - Few if any passive voice

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Passive vs. Active Voice

Passive Voice

- The chores were always done early in the morning by Luke. He was treated kindly by his wife, Alice, and by his daughter, Mary. In the mornings he was pampered by his wife at breakfast time. In the evening he was treated to songs by his daughter. The cows were milked before 6 o'clock by Luke, and the chickens were fed by him before 7.

Active Voice

- Luke always did the chores early in the morning. His wife, Alice, and his daughter, Mary, treated him kindly. In the mornings, his wife pampered him at breakfast time. In the evening, his daughter treated him to some songs. Luke milked the cows before 6 o'clock and fed the chickens by 7.

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Putting It All Together

- Assemble written topics into a single document
 - Chronologically
 - By Theme
 - Be Creative

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Putting It All Together

- Print it at home
- Make a PDF File
 - Portable Document File
 - Easy to share
 - Preferred format at print and copy shops

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Thank You!

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