

MEMOIR FORM

Year 11 Advanced

Memor: an <u>account</u> of one's personal life and experiences	Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A memory; a description of an event from the past - Written in the first person; told from one person's point of view - Based on truth - Reveals the feelings of the writer - Has meaning; shows what the author learned from the experience - Focused on one event; about one point in the author's life - About the author's experience more than about the event itself
Point of view	the narrator's position in relation to the story being told.
1st person	- first person: the speakers perspective – I, we, me
2nd person	- Second person: the readers actions are narrated; you, your
3rd person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Omniscient: Omniscient point of view means that the reader is privy to all character's inner thoughts and feelings. o Subjective: Subjective or Limited point of view, the reader can only see and know the thoughts and inner emotions of the point of view character. The reader is "limited" to the thoughts of just one character. For all other characters in the scene, the reader can only see what they say or do and don't know the other characters' inner thoughts. o Objective: Objective point of view means that the reader doesn't see any character's inner thoughts and feelings, not even those of the point of view character. Instead, the reader is only witness to outer actions and dialogue. Think of this as using a movie camera to record an event. A camera can't record the thoughts or feelings of a person, only what they say, do or display with expressions on their face or body language.
<p>"Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens, focusing on a time in the writer's life that was unusually vivid, such as childhood or adolescence, or that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—p. 15 of <i>Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir</i> by William Zinsser (Mariner Books, 1998)</p>	

What is a memoir?

Definition: Memoir is not an autobiography. In other words, it is not the story of your whole life. Memoir is a slice of life, a story of part of your life or a story from your life.

The scope of memoir will vary depending on the subject matter, but more often than not, aspiring memoirists come to the page with too much story that needs to be pared down. One way to do that is to get clear about your themes. Memoir is often reined in by the writer knowing what their themes are and writing each scene while holding two questions in mind:

- How does this scene relate to my theme?
- What sense am I trying to make of my story through writing this scene?

Memoir is about creating understanding, making sense of your story so that others can relate.

What draws readers into a good memoir is the subject matter (surviving a trauma, an exciting memory) or the theme (nostalgia, trauma, overwhelming joy, identity).

A reader may find themselves wondering what's the point of this memoir? If there's nothing in the story for the reader, the memoir is lacking **reflection and takeaway**, which are two key elements that are unique to memoir and are therefore also two key elements that define the genre.

How to write a memoir

If you're planning to write a memoir, you'll want to take your readers on a journey they won't forget.

- Your memoir should be written as a snapshot of a theme or two from your lived experience. Consider a pie, where your life represents the whole pie, and you are writing a book about a teeny-tiny sliver.
- You want your readers to walk away knowing you, and a particular experience you lived through, on a much deeper level, but also to apply their own understanding of their own experiences to your story.

Example: Imagine you are writing a memoir about your three-week trek through the Himalayan Mountains. While the focus would be on your trip, as well as what you learned about yourself along the way, you would be wise to also include other details about the place, the people your experience, and what you learned not only about yourself, but about human nature and the wider world. You could describe the geography and history of the area, share interesting snippets about the people and animals you interacted with, and discuss your exploration of the meaning of it all as you progressed along your arduous journey.

Your readers want to know about *you*, but also about what got you to this place to begin with. What prompted the trek? What is your backstory? What did you learn about yourself along the way? It's these kinds of vivid details and astute observations that make for a powerful memoir.

- One of the best tips for how to write a powerful memoir is to be honest and genuine. It's important that you mine for the truth of your story – even if it makes your journey as an author more difficult.
- **Memoirs explore the concept of truth as seen through your eyes.** The motivation for writing a memoir should simply be to share an experience that readers can relate to.

- You don't need to fabricate or embellish, so memoir is all about recreating what happened while honouring the emotional truth of your story.
- Powerful writers show, not tell. This is essential to your success, because you must invite your reader into your perspective so they can draw their own conclusions.
- The best way to do this is to unfold the story before your reader's eyes by using vivid language that helps your reader visualize each scene.

Example: Perhaps you want to explain that your aunt was a “raging alcoholic.” If you say this directly, your description will likely come across as judgmental and critical. Instead, paint a picture for your audience so they come to this conclusion on their own. You might write something like this:

“Vodka bottles littered her bedroom, and I had learned the hard way not to knock on her door until well after 2pm. Most days she didn't emerge into our living quarters until closer to sunset, and I would read her facial expression to gauge whether or not I should inquire about money—just so I could eat one meal before bedtime.”

- Many of the best memoir writers focus on a few key characteristics of their characters, allowing the reader to get to know them in depth. Your readers must be able to feel emotions about your characters—love or hate or something in between.
- To bring your characters alive, bring details like the characters' tone of voice, how they talk, their body language and movements, and their style of speech.
- The best memoirs evoke feelings in your readers and connect their emotions, as the protagonist, with pivotal reflections and takeaways about the happening throughout your narrative arc.
- By the end of your memoir, you need to have shown growth or change or transformation of yourself, the protagonist of your story.
- Whatever experiences you had throughout your memoir will carry more weight when you show how they affected you along your journey, and how you grew and changed as a result of what you lived through, or what you survived. How did what you went through change your approach to life? Change how you thought about others or yourself? Help you become a better or wiser person in some way?
- If you make meaning from your story, your readers will find meaning in your story, too!

