

Why Write an Autobiography?

The main reason is to introduce to the world (and your readers) to the wonderfully unique YOU! You are like none other, created in God's own image, and knit together in your mother's womb in a fantastic and distinctive way. God's plan for your life is different from any other person's and the skills and talents that He gives you equip you for life ahead – your life, your path, your responsibilities, and your ministry. Memories fade as you enter that life ahead, but written documentation lasts.

As you write your autobiography, write it as a book. You don't need the Roman numerals. They are for instructional purposes only. Your book should flow like a story, because that's what it is – the story of your life.

Use pictures where applicable, especially pictures of *you*. You can color copy the originals and paste in the copies. That way, the originals stay safe in your parents' albums. This is a fun unit, and is not meant to be drudgery. If you are struggling with any of the parts, talk to a parent and ask them to tell you stories of when you were little.

The Process of Writing Your Autobiography

With the exception of the Journal section, you should work on the pages to mastery. In other words, go ahead and write a rough draft. Then correct it and revise it until it is just perfect. Sometimes you get a picture in your mind that doesn't easily translate into words. You might know what you want to say, but it's not coming out clearly. That's what revisions and editing are for. Write, correct, revise, write again. Repeat as necessary.

Your teacher will tell you whether to type out your pages or hand-write them. Though typing them will give it a uniform look, handwriting them is very personal and gives the book an heirloom quality. Each way has its own benefit. If you do decide to type it out, at least do the journaling section in your own handwriting.

Are you thinking about what you'll include? This book is set up to guide you through various sections step-by-step, but you may choose to include more photos and more information. When completed, it will be a treasure to keep and a snapshot in time.

II. Title

What a Title Does

Your title, though very small, is of great importance. It draws your reader in for a second look. If you are renowned in your field or easily recognizable, you might want to use the same title that Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Frank Lloyd Wright and Roald Dahl did. Can you guess it? Yes, it's simply "Autobiography." Most of us need something a little flashier.

Your title should tell the reader in one concise statement what your book is about. Can you match the autobiographies below with their authors?

Up From Slavery	Billy Graham
Ace!	Ronald Reagan
Just As I Am	Booker T. Washington
An American Life	Mother Teresa
Everything Starts from Prayer	Mel Paisley (WWII fighter pilot)

Can you see how effective a few simple words are? Your assignment for this class is to come up with a title for your autobiography which reflects YOU. Those who know you best should be able to pick your title out as yours from any dozen. Brainstorm. Write down everything that comes to mind, no matter how silly or far-fetched it initially sounds. You'll be discarding all but one of them anyway.

If you are completely stuck for a title and can't even brainstorm anything, it's okay to come back to it at the conclusion of your writing. Sometimes it helps to have everything else laid out before tying it together with a title. Whether writing it first or last however, the title deserves a lot of thought. It is that lure to attract your reader.

III. Introductory Paragraph

After your title page comes your introduction. This is a one-paragraph summary of your life. It should be something that can be read in less than a minute. This page is to convince the reader that he wants to continue. Your title page caught the reader's eye. Your introduction hooks him for a closer look.

Your introduction deserves its own page. Choose something interesting from your life and expand on it. What is it about YOU that is going to make ME want to read further?

In our example, the sentence "I was born on a sunny afternoon in April, and the sun's been shining on me ever since" makes me want to know what about his life is so good, and what it is that makes him happy.

If your introductory paragraph starts with "I'm doing this book because it's part of my class," is that going to make the reader want to continue? It's doubtful. Every person who has ever lived is interesting; with some, you just have to dig a little deeper. Each of us has a story to tell. Use this paragraph to make your reader want to find out just what it is that makes you tick.



Which of these actual autobiography introductions makes you want to continue?

"Dear son, I have ever had pleasure in obtaining any little anecdotes of my ancestors." (*Benjamin Franklin*)

"My line comes down from Queen Ada, the sister of Malcolm IV, descended from King Duff, the first King of Scotland." (*Johnny Cash*)

"I was born the 30th of November, 1835, in the almost invisible village of Florida, Monroe County, Missouri. My parents removed to Missouri in the early thirties; I do not remember just when, for I was not born then and cared nothing for such things." (*Mark Twain*)

"So many misstatements, wittingly or unwittingly, have been made regarding my father and me, that I wish here to set down the facts of my life – and some of his – as they truly were." (*George Washington – actually a biography written as if it were an autobiography*)

IV. Coat of Arms

Your personal Coat of Arms is next. Copy the blank one on the next page, or draw your own. Your Coat of Arms should reflect your personality and your character. It should be a statement of who you are.

Proverbs 22:1 tells us that “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.” The Coat of Arms is important because it is a symbol of your family’s pride and honor, your “good name”. That good name goes across the top. What kind of name is it? Your lettering style is important. Is your last name on the plain side? You could either block print (keeping with it being plain), or fancy it up with intricately drawn script. The length of your name need not necessarily determine the size of the lettering.

Next, choose two colors for the backfield. Colors evoke emotion. What do you think of when you see purple and gold? How about pastel pink? Bright red? Through experience, we have attached emotions to different colors. Though each of us is unique, colors affect many of us in the same way. There is a reason that fast-food restaurants are orange and yellow. “Hurry!” comes to mind for most patrons and employees alike. Likewise, we see pastel pinks and blues in nurseries and hospitals because they are calming. Choose colors that reflect your individual personality. What might your descendants think if you used black and white? Purple and gold? Choose with a purpose.

Now think about four things that you will always love. What things are important to you? They can be an idea (truth), a person (your mother), or something tangible (books). Anything at all that reflects what is important in your life. Choose wisely. “Pizza” probably isn’t the best choice. Will it still be important to you when you’re 50? Probably not. However, your best friend or your dog may very well be. Cut out something from a magazine to represent each of your choices, or create your own icon.

Last, choose a phrase that has meaning for you. It should not be overly wordy, four or five words maximum. Would you be proud for your ancestors to have had “ad maiorem Dei gloriam” or “Faithful servants of the king” on their coat? I certainly would.

Remember, your book is for posterity. Don’t choose things like chocolate or root beer. You may not always love them. Similarly, don’t choose a phrase that won’t have the same meaning to your grandchildren. Avoid slang. Years down the line, “I’m really cool” or “She’s Phat” might not mean exactly the same thing as it does to you.