



PREPARING TO WRITE YOUR LIFE STORIES

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Sometimes getting started is the hardest part of the whole process. No matter what type of life stories project you are considering, this guide will help you define it, commit to it, and get the ball rolling.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

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To print on a computer, look for the printer icon  OR try Ctrl+P on Windows and Command+P on a Mac.

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INTRODUCTION



Whether you have just started thinking about a life stories project or you have been taking notes and kicking the idea around for some time, the steps in this guide will help you get prepared mentally and *physically*.

Your project doesn't need to fit any specific definition, but here are a few types of projects where I think the steps in this guide might be helpful.

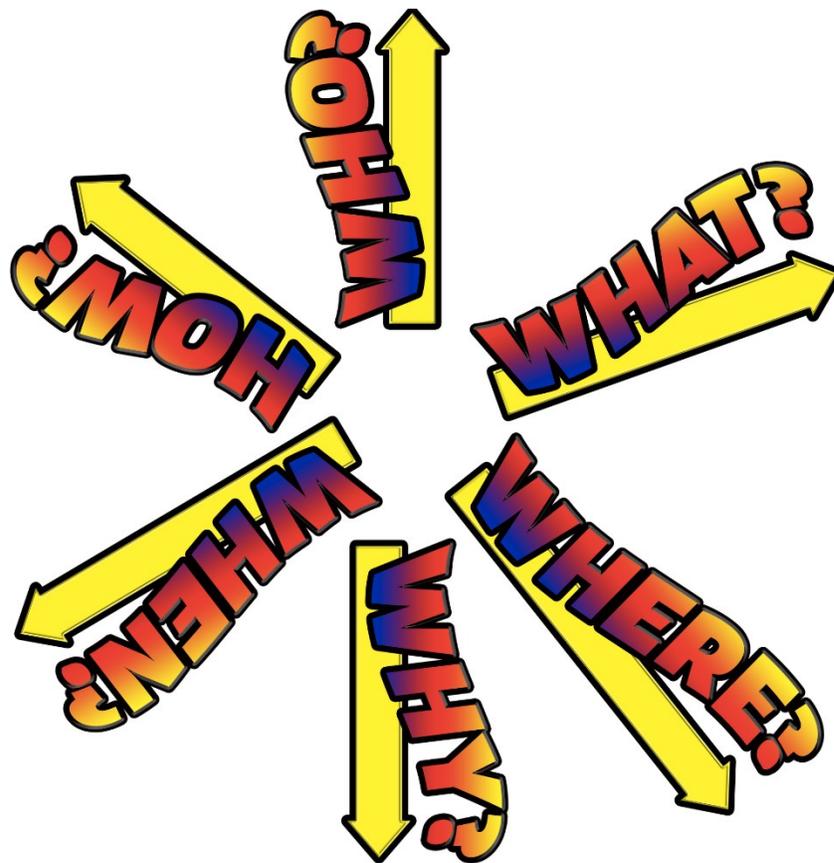
- Memoir
- Autobiography
- Biography
- Personal History
- Family History
- Community History
- Special Event Memories
- Vacation Stories

You will start by defining your project and assembling your tools. Then you will have the chance to write down some thoughts about what you are considering including in your project. Finally, you will start the process of filling in the gaps in your stories.

DEFINING YOUR PROJECT

You are probably familiar with the 5Ws and 1H questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. Most often we hear about them in a journalistic context as writers try to answer these questions to fully develop their stories. However, they are also widely used in many other contexts and I think they are incredibly helpful for anyone preparing to write life stories.

Answering these questions about your own project will save you time and help keep you focused on what is relevant. However, if you cannot answer all of these questions at the beginning, give yourself permission to let the process unfold naturally and guide you to the answers.



Let's get started! Look through the questions on the following pages and answer the ones that seem “easy” before digging into those about which you have less certainty.

Who?



Who is it about?

The answer might be as simple as “Me” or “Mom” or whoever’s life stories you are writing. If you are writing about a group of people such as in a community history, you might say something like “citizens of Springfield”.

A: _____

Who is the intended audience?

Are you writing for your family or your community? Are you planning to publish and sell your work to a larger audience? Is it simply for you?

A: _____

Who might provide help to you with the project?

There might be people involved in the stories that can help you with the details or provide photos and/or documents. You will probably want someone to proofread and help edit your writing. You may want help formatting the document or self-publishing. Don’t let these details overwhelm you. If you don’t have the skills or know someone who has the skills, there are very affordable ways to get all of this done. For now, just take notes about what help you might need and anyone who might be able to help.

A: _____

WHAT?



What do you want to write about?

Is there a theme? Is it a certain time period or event? Is it a collection of independent topics about your life?

A: _____

What will it look like when it is finished?

Will it be an e-book or printed book? Will it include photographs and/or documents? Will it be a narrated photo slideshow or posted on a website or a blog?

A: _____

WHERE?



Where will you do your writing?

Think of a place or two where you will enjoy doing your writing. Choose places which are quiet and comfortable and likely to have very few distractions. Write down any place you think might help get your juices flowing.

A: _____

Where will you keep your writing, your photos and documents, your notes, and your supplies?

If you are doing most of the work on your computer, create a folder just for storing your documents and photos. Whether or not you are using a computer, you will need a physical space for keeping your resources (binder, notebook, pens, photos, and documents) together. See the [Gather Your Tools](#) section of this guide.

A: _____

WHEN?



When do you want to have it finished?

It's just fine if you want to enjoy the process without having a deadline, but if you don't want it to go on indefinitely, set a date for which you wish to have it finished. You may even want to set smaller milestones as you go.

A: _____

When will you do your writing?

Not everyone will need or want to set time aside to write, but for most of us, scheduling time to write is the only way it will ever get done. Whether you like scheduling a month in advance or a week in advance, put it on the calendar and honor your commitment!

A: _____

WHY?



Why are you writing?

*Do you want to share your most significant life stories with your family? Do you have a story that might engage a larger audience in a meaningful way? Do you feel it might be therapeutic? Do you have advice or hard-earned wisdom you want to share? Write down all **your** reasons for writing.*

A: _____

How?



How will you distribute it when you are finished?

Will it be something that can be e-mailed or mailed? Will it be available for purchase on Amazon? Will you wrap it up and share it as a gift?

A: _____

How will you get it into your final format so that it can be distributed?

This may be where you turn to "Who", but some people will have the skills or want to learn the skills required to finish the job. If that's you, list the steps that you will need to take. If you have concerns about any of the steps, write that down too.

A: _____

How will it feel when it is done?

Allow yourself to think about what it will feel like to have this completed? Will it be a relief? Will you have a better understanding of something you've experienced? Will your family or community be grateful? Will it give insight, perspective, or hope to someone?

A: _____

How will it feel if you don't do it?

Will your family be left with unanswered questions? Will you feel like you left something incomplete. Will you be letting someone down?

A: _____

GATHER YOUR TOOLS!



Now that you have defined your project, it's time to start your physical preparation.

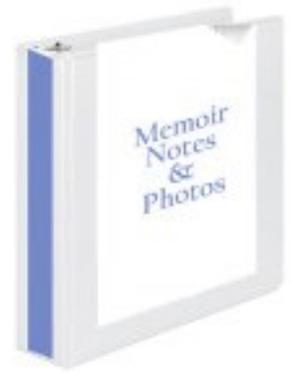
At the very least, you should have a notebook to keep track of questions, ideas and other random thoughts that come to you. Here are two methods that work well for keeping your project organized. Read through them and see which one resonates with your style of organization and put together your own "Life Stories Kit". You should be able to find all of the supplies at your local office supply store, or you can [grab them quickly right now from our Amazon powered store](#).

Method 1: Keep it Together in a Box

- **Box** – Use a box to keep everything together for your project. The size of the box will depend upon how many photos and documents you expect to use and the size of them. You will also want to make sure your notebook fits in the box. It doesn't have to be a pretty box from a store, but Amazon and office supply stores carry numerous options if you prefer one. 
- **Notebook and Pen** – Pick your favorite type of notebook and your favorite pen. Title the first page of your notebook "Notes and Questions to Address Later". Leave 5-10 blank pages for notes in this section. Writing down questions and concerns as you encounter them will keep them from becoming roadblocks to your progress. Write down the question or concern and keep moving until you have a chance to address it later. The next section should be labeled "Stories". The title on the first page of this section should be "Stories I Definitely Want to Include". We'll talk more about other sections later.
- **Post-it Flags or Post-it Tabs** – Use tabs or flags to designate sections of your notebook for easy reference.
- **Acid-free envelopes** – Use acid-free envelopes for protecting your photos and documents.
- [Shop for Supplies](#)

Method 2: Store It All in a Binder

- **Binder** – The size of the **binder** you will need depends on how many photos you think you will have. A one- or two-inch binder should work just fine.
- **Acid-free sleeves** – Use acid-free sleeves designed for a binder to protect your photos and documents.
- **Dividers** – You’ll want to be able to find notes about particular topics and you may want to organize your photos by topic or perhaps by where they belong. For instance, if you took 10 photos out of your green photo album and want to put them back when you’re done, you might have a divider tab labeled “Green Album”.
- **Loose leaf notebook paper** – Put loose leaf paper in your binder and title the first page “Notes and Questions to Address Later”. Leave a few blank pages for notes in this section. Writing down questions and concerns as you encounter them will keep them from becoming roadblocks to your progress. Write down your question or concern and keep moving until you have a chance to address it later. The divider after this section should be labeled “Stories”. The title on the first page of this section should be “Stories I Definitely Want to Include”. We’ll talk more about other sections later.
- **Binder Cover Page** – If your binder has a clear front that allows you to slip in a cover page, you can download and print one of our pre-designed cover pages at the [back of this guide](#).
- [Shop for Supplies](#)



GETTING OUT OF THE GATE...



Now that you have defined your life stories project and assembled the tools you will be using, it's time to get out of the gate quickly to further solidify your commitment.

Grab your notebook or binder and start by going to that section titled "Stories I Definitely Want to Include". Chances are you've got a few in mind already. If they fit with your project's definition, jot them down with just enough detail so you'll recognize them later. Leave some blank pages in this section for other stories that you will likely remember as you take this journey.



Next, create a new section in the notebook titled "Stories I May Want to Include". Put a Post-it Flag here or a divider page if you are using a binder. Just quickly jot down ANY stories, topics, or themes that you MAY want to consider adding to your life stories project. If there are stories that don't exactly fit your project's definition, include them on this list. Again, keep it brief at this point.

After you write down those stories that come to mind easily, spend a little time brainstorming. Write down any topics, themes, or stories that pop into your head.

Next, go through all the notes you have made and think about anything else you need to tell each story:

- Do you have all the details you need for a topic or story? Would it enhance your story to talk with someone else who was there?
- Is there any context for your story that research might be able to provide?
- Are there any photos or documents that you would like to include in this section of your project?

Start a new section in your notebook for these notes. "Who and What Can Help Tell the Story" might be a good title.

FILLING IN THE GAPS



In the previous section of this guide, you may have made some notes about people with whom you could talk to add more insight to your stories. Now is a great time to make those phone calls or send e-mail messages with specific questions. You may be surprised to find that talking about it will even help **you** remember the details better.

If you are not planning to surprise your family and friends with your life stories book, telling them about it during the process can prove to be quite motivational. They may also have suggestions for stories you should include. If you are planning to write about loved ones, you may want to ask if they have any special memories of something you did together. If you don't wish to reveal that you are writing your life stories, you can always just start a conversation with "Remember when..."

You may also have some questions regarding facts and dates that you don't know right off the top of your head. Some of the answers can be found on the Internet, but others may be in photos, scrapbooks or old calendars. If not yours, maybe a friend or relative can help fill in the blanks.

There may be more information that needs to be gathered once you start writing, however, completing this step should give you a nice head start.



WHAT'S NEXT?



First, schedule some time on your calendar to write. Second, honor your commitment to your writing appointments as you would any other appointment.

Next, we would like to invite you to JOIN US for the...

Write Your Life Stories



It's a **FREE** 28-Day Challenge designed to guide you step-by-step from brainstorming to editing **ONE** chapter of a life stories or family history project. It's not for professional writers, but for the rest of us who might need a little help and encouragement along the way.

It's designed to be able to be completed in **10 – 30 minutes a day for 28 Days**, but you can go at **any pace that suits your schedule**.

In the "One Chapter Challenge", you will receive:

- **Step-by-step guidance** on what to do every day.
- a one-month **Membership to MemoirWorkbook.com**.
- Membership to the **Write Your Life Stories Facebook Group** where you can **ask questions and interact with others** on the same journey.
- **Tutorials, worksheets, and more!**

Take Me to the Challenge Sign-up Page

[Take Me to the Challenge Sign-Up Page](#)

OUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

[Get it Done! Memoir Workbook](#) - Hundreds of memory prompts and lots of writing space, plus it covers the basics of writing and producing any type of life stories book or e-book.

[Write Your Life Stories in 30 Days](#) – Whether or not you want to get it done quickly, this workbook will provide structure for those looking for a “how to” reference to guide them through the process from start to finish.

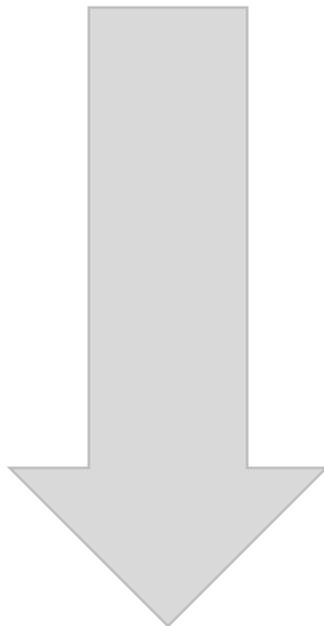
[Online Memoir Writing Software \(MemoirWorkbook.com\)](#) – **Try it FREE for one month!** Our goal with this software was to remove the hurdles that keep people from writing and sharing their life stories. It’s super flexible and easy to use. [MemoirWorkbook.com](#)...



- Has hundreds of memory prompts if you need some help getting started. However, you can start from scratch if you prefer.
- Makes it easy to add photos and images.
- Is simple to use...even for the technologically challenged!
- Can be easily customized to fit your story.
- Works on your computer, tablet, and smartphone.
- Saves \$\$\$ and time... **Instantly create beautifully formatted Word and PDF versions of your story.**

*If you have any questions or experience any roadblocks, stop by [MemoirHelper.com](#) for all sorts of free tips or **reach out on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#), [Twitter](#), or [YouTube](#).***

PRINTABLE BINDER COVERS



Life Stories Project



Memoir Kit



Autobiography

Notes & More

