



**August 2013**

## How to market your memoir or autobiography

Do people keep saying, “You should write a book”? Are you thinking of finally sitting down and writing your life story? Or perhaps you’ve already put your story together and think that it might finally be time to publish. But how do you differentiate your story from the thousands of memoirs found in bookstores and online? Rather than focus on aspects of your life that are common in most people’s experiences (getting married, having children, etc.), try looking at what sets your story apart from the rest. Just because the events in the book actually happened doesn’t mean that the story should be boring. When writing your press releases and marketing copy, give some thought to the following questions:

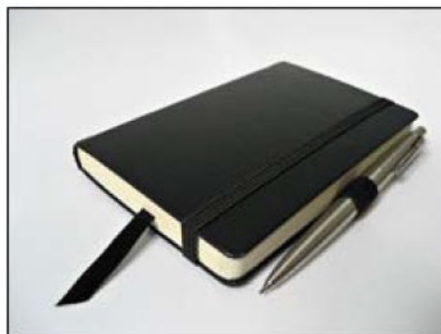


- What are some of the themes in my book?
- Is there a conflict? Are there heroes and villains?
- What can the reader learn from my book?

If you find yourself struggling with answering some of these questions, consider asking for help from your editor or someone close to you. Look at your answers to the above questions to help you decide which publications or media outlets you would like to approach. Is caring for a loved one with a disability a theme of your story? Consider approaching an advocacy group. Were you a leader in your field before you decided to retire? Trade magazines often like to highlight individuals. As hard as it might be, stepping out of the role of author and putting yourself in the place of the reader will help guide you when deciding how to market your autobiography.

## First, second, or third person? Who will tell your story?

When beginning any creative writing project, one of the most important decisions you will make is which “voice” to use for the narrative. Your choice will depend on the tone you want, the amount of intimacy you hope to develop between the reader and the main character, and the complexity of your plot. There is no absolutely correct decision, but each voice lends itself better to a different kind of writing.



In **first-person narrative**, the writer speaks as the voice of one main character. The advantage to this is that the reader truly “sees” the events through the character’s eyes, but the limitation is that only one person’s point of view can be represented. This can make it difficult to describe events that aren’t directly witnessed by the narrator. Writers must also be aware of beginning too many sentences with “I” followed by a verb. First person can be fun in other cases, however, such as when using an “unreliable narrator” to convey to the reader that the voice telling the story doesn’t actually have the whole picture, or does but is lying or delusional!

**Second-person narrative** is the most unusual voice in which to tell a story. In it, the author is addressing the reader. This is hard to sustain, and it can impose too many constraints on the writer, leading to repetition and monotonous storytelling. But, if the plot contains enough movement, and the tone of voice is not too smug or authoritarian, it can work. Jay McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* is an example of a successful novel written in the second person.

Writing in **third-person narrative**, or from multiple points of view, is the most flexible form for fiction. It allows the author to capture a variety of voices and the reader to be omniscient, knowing things that not all the characters know. This is very useful when writing mystery or romance novels, or indeed any story where plot and people’s reactions to events play a big part in moving the story along.

Whichever voice you choose for your writing, you must be consistent and creative. Avoid abrupt changes in voice and repetition in sentence structure. If you have doubts, take some chances and play around: Try writing the same story in first, second, and third person to see which works best.

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