

# WRITING YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY

## FIVE EASY STEPS

### 1. MAKE A DESIGNATED TIME DURING THE WEEK TO WRITE

It can be as little as thirty minutes, one or two days a week. The key is to pick a time when you are mentally sharp and commit to it. If you sit down every Monday and Wednesday at 9:30 or 2:30 with the intention of writing, writing will happen! You can write longhand on legal pads or in an 8 1/2 by 11 spiral notebook, or you can write on the computer. Start with committing to thirty minutes, and you may find some days you happily write for longer.

### 2. USE A PHOTOGRAPH, LETTER OR MEMENTO TO LOOSEN YOUR MEMORIES

Having a visual stimulus in front of us makes writing easy. Just start describing what you see. This picture is from “x” time and place. This letter was written by “x”. This object was given to me by “y.” Half the battle of writing memoir is the age old question: “What do I write about? There’s a whole life to choose from.” With visual cues, you have a goal to write about this photo or memento today.

### 3. WRITE LISTS OF PEOPLE, PLACES, EVENTS IN YOUR PAST

Start your thirty minutes with writing a list of, say, houses you have lived in, or aunts and uncles, or boyfriends and girlfriends, family vacations, teachers you liked, books you loved. Use these lists as a memory source. Choose a name or a place and write about it. There’s no need to be tied to chronological order. Follow what interests you. You can arrange your stories in chronological order another time, if you desire.

### 4. FEEL FREE TO WRITE CONVERSATIONALLY

Let the writing flow, almost as if you were verbally telling the story to someone. You don’t have to judge the beauty of your sentences or your clever turn of phrase. Use your thirty minutes to just freely record your memory. You can return to it later and brush up the prose if you desire.

### 5. USE DETAILS

When you write about a memory, write down visceral details. How clothing felt, the hot or cold weather, smells and sounds of the day or evening. Details make your writing personal and fascinating.

### A NOTE ABOUT STORING/SHARING YOUR WRITING

Don’t let logistical questions about editing and storage stop you from getting the memories recorded. Once you’ve gotten into the groove of writing, there are many ways to organize and share the work. You can keep your hand-written notebooks all together in a box. You can hire someone to help type and organize them in the computer, or you can write directly into the computer and organize and edit yourself.